

S E R M O N S,

PAROCHIAL AND DOMESTIC USE.

• L O N D O N :
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S E R M O N S,

PAROCHIAL AND DOMESTIC USE,

DESIGNED TO

ILLUSTRATE AND ENFORCE, IN A CONNECTED VIEW,

THE MOST IMPORTANT ARTICLES

OF

CHRISTIAN FAITH AND PRACTICE.

RICHARD MANT, D.D.

(NOW LORD BISHOP OF DOWN AND CONNOR,)

DOMESTIC CHAPLAIN TO THE LATE ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY.

"I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified."—1 Cor. ii. 2.

"To preach practical sermons, as they are called, that is, sermons upon virtues and vices, without inculcating those great Scripture truths of redemption, grace, &c. which alone can incite and enable us to forsake sin, and follow after righteousness; what is it but to put together the wheels, and set the hands of a watch, forgetting the spring, which is to make them all go?"—Br. HORNE.

SIXTH EDITION.

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Adapted to the close of the old, or the beginning of the new year.

SERMON XXVI.

NECESSITY AND BENEFITS OF THE LORD'S SUPPER.

1 Cor. x. 16.


The cup of blessing, which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? the bread, which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?

WHEN I consider the number of persons, of which this parish consists, it is matter of surprise and grief to me to observe, that there appears to be a large proportion of those, who show little serious attention to a business of such infinite importance to them as their religion. When again I look round upon the present congregation, and see amongst you many persons, who appear to be generally well and soberly disposed, and who are for the most part attentive to the ordinary service of the Church; it is to me still more surprising, and certainly not less painful to observe, that there are so few who are in the habit of attending to that great point of Christ-

ian worship ; the holy communion of the body and blood of Christ.

There are indeed few occasions in the exercise of their office, on which the ministers of the Gospel have in general more cause to feel concern, than when they are compelled to witness in their parishioners the prevailing neglect of the Lord's Supper. Regularly as the seasons of administering the holy sacrament return, in obedience to the prescribed order of the Church we give you notice and invite you to partake of it. Frequently we make the sacrament the subject of our discourses : we explain it ; we exhort our congregations to come to the Lord's table ; we lay before them such arguments as should induce them to come ; and we show the weakness of the reasons, which most probably prevent them from coming. Yet have we too often occasion to lament, that season after season passes by, without the notice being duly regarded ; that our exhortations, our arguments and our remonstrances are followed by no effect ; and that very few even of those, who are generally of sober and serious habits, and regular in their attendance upon the ordinary service of the Church, ever think of approaching the Lord's table.

Now in the name of Christ, into whose name you have been all baptized, to whom you have all vowed allegiance, and whose faithful soldiers and

servants you all profess yourselves to be ; wherefore, I pray you, is this neglect of his authority ? Are you Christians ? Do you think yourselves bound to obey the laws of Christ ? Has not Christ commanded you to partake of his body ? to drink of his blood ? “ The cup of blessing, which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ ? the bread, which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ ? ” Wherefore then, when in obedience to his command,  bless the bread and wine and set it before you ; do you, in violation of his command, refuse to receive it ? Wherefore, when by the mouth of his ministers, he bids you to his table, do you refuse to partake of his Supper, though you are invited to partake of it as the means of saving your own souls, and in remembrance of him ?

Amidst the concern, which I feel, on observing so many amongst you neglectful of the holy communion, it would give me some relief, could I learn what are the reasons, that keep you away. Perhaps you have never given the subject that attention, which a subject connected with the present and future health of your eternal souls, most undoubtedly demands of you. Perhaps you may think yourselves too ignorant to come to the Lord's table. Perhaps you may think yourselves on account of your infirmities not fit to come thither. Perhaps some of you may think

yourselves too young ; and may be willing to put off a business, which you consider, and rightly consider, as of a very serious nature, till you shall be somewhat more advanced in your journey through life.

If there is any one amongst you, who feels a scruple about coming to the Lord's Supper, from one of these causes, or upon some other account ; it would be well if he were to act agreeably to the exhortation of the Church, and state his scruples to his minister in private, and give him an opportunity of endeavouring to remove them. The Church of England expressly represents it to be the duty of all her parishioners to communicate in this holy sacrament : and specifically calls upon all, who have any doubts or scruples about communicating, to address themselves for satisfaction to their parish minister. In the mean time as the cases, which I have just mentioned, will probably apply to many persons ; I shall therefore make it my present business to examine them, and pray God for Christ's sake that what I shall say, may not be without some influence on your minds.

Are there then, in the first place, any among you, who have not seriously thought upon your obligation to receive the Lord's Supper, and who neglect to partake of it for want of consideration ? Give me your attention, I pray you, for a

few moments, whilst I endeavour to awaken you from your state of thoughtlessness and insensibility, to a sense of that duty, which you owe to God and to yourselves.

You know, that our first parents, Adam and Eve, were created by God good, and of course happy :—that they were to continue in that state, as long as they should continue obedient to God ;—that they disobeyed the commandment, which God had commanded them ;—that they in consequence together with their virtue lost their happiness ; and withal the favour of God ;—that the very nature of man was thereby made corrupt and prone to evil ;—and that both they and their offspring became subject to sin, to misery, and to death.

You know, that the Son of God undertook to redeem and to save mankind from this sad state, into which they had thus most lamentably fallen :—to satisfy the offended justice of his Father ;—to suffer in his own person, and thereby to make atonement, for the sins of men ;—and at the same time to repair and to renew that nature, which was so fatally polluted and diseased, by giving to men a new spirit, and by enabling them both to will and to do things pleasing unto God.

You know that in order to this, the Son of God was made man ;—that in that form he took upon himself the nature and the sins of men ;—that

he then submitted to a cruel and disgraceful death, for the redemption and salvation of you and of all mankind ; whom he thus restored to the favour of God, and thereby made it possible for you to recover that happiness, which had been lost by the original fall of our first parents.

Finally you know, that God was so pleased with the wonderful love and goodness shown in this precious sacrifice of his Son, that he promised to pardon all men, who through faith in his blood should truly repent of their sins, and should prove their repentance by obeying the commandments of his Son, and should thus fulfil the conditions, which he was pleased to appoint for their salvation.

These things (I say) you all know, and knowing these things, must you not think, nay rather must you not know it to be a duty which you owe to Christ, to obey any commandment, which he may lay upon you, in return for the sufferings which he endured for your sakes and for the blessings which he has purchased for you? Must you not know it to be a duty, which you owe to yourselves, to obey his commandments, if on your obedience to his commandments depends the question, whether or not you shall receive any share in those blessings, which he died to purchase ?

Surely the most inattentive and thoughtless man amongst you, if he thinks at all, must know

that obedience to the commandments of Christ is on every account the duty of him, who calls himself a Christian. Is then the partaking in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper one of the commandments of Christ?—Hear and consider the words of one of his Apostles, and then answer for yourselves.

“ I have received of the Lord” (saith St. Paul in his first Epistle to the Corinthians) “ that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night, in which he was betrayed, took bread : and when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat ; this is my body, which is broken for you : this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood : this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till he come¹.”

If you attend to this passage, you will find an express commandment positively and clearly given by our Saviour, Jesus Christ, in these words, which occur twice in the course of the passage : “ this do in remembrance of me.” Christ then commanded something to be done.

If again you consider the passage, you will

¹ 1 Cor. xi. 23—26.

find what it was that he commanded to be done. He was blessing and giving bread and wine, when he told the persons to whom he gave them, to do the same things in remembrance of him. To bless and give bread and wine then are the things, which Christ commanded to be done.

If again you consider the passage, and compare it with the accounts given of the institution of the Lord's Supper by St. Matthew, St. Mark, and St. Luke, you will perceive, that the commandment of Christ to bless and give bread and wine in remembrance of him, was first committed to his Apostles, at that time the ministers of his word :—and if you further consider it, you will perceive that it was not meant to be confined to them alone, but was also committed to those, who should succeed the Apostles as ministers of the Gospel, because St. Paul speaks of “ showing the Lord's death till he come.” And as the Lord will not come again before the end of the world, the commandment must remain in force as long as the world shall last.

You see then, that the ministers of Christ are commanded by him to bless and to give bread and wine in remembrance of him. And to whom are they to give them ? Why, certainly to the people committed to their spiritual charge ; who are therefore as much bound to attend and partake in the Lord's Supper, as the minister is

bound to attend and distribute it : for we cannot give, as we are commanded, unless you are ready to receive.

Is it not then the commandment of your Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, that you partake in the holy communion of his body and blood ? Is not the partaking in it a duty, which you owe to Christ who died for you, and to whom you promised obedience at your Baptism ? And is it not a duty, which you owe to yourselves, if you would receive any benefit from his death ?

And this, I say, Christian brethren, even supposing this to be no more than an ordinary commandment of our Saviour. But there are circumstances, which distinguish this from all other commandments, and make it in an especial manner your duty.

It is the last and, as it were, the dying commandment and request of your Saviour. He, who was on the right hand of God the Father, in whom shone the fulness of his Father's glory, and who was the express image of his person ; he humbled himself for you ; he took your nature and form upon him ; he became obedient unto death, even the cruel and ignominious death of the cross ; and when he was now upon the point of fulfilling his surprising love towards you by laying down his life for your sakes, he gives you this commandment, that you eat and drink the

bread and wine offered you by his ministers ! Is not the last request of a dying friend entitled to some regard ? And of Him too, who was such a friend ?

It is the way, by which you are to show that you “remember” Christ, and have a just sense of his goodness towards you. “This do (said he) in remembrance of me.” You may indeed say that you remember Christ, that you have a just sense of his goodness, although you do not partake in the communion of his body and blood. But if he has appointed a particular way, by which he would have you remember him, I know not how you can show that you do remember him, except by following that one way ; and I know not how you can stand acquitted of forgetfulness and ingratitude to him, unless you perform this his commandment.

The partaking in the Lord’s Supper is again the only proper act of Christian worship. The professors of other religions, Jews, Turks, and Heathens, worship God by praying to, by thanking, and by praising him. In addition to these acts of worship, Christians perform that of eating and drinking bread and wine, as Christ has commanded. So that however devoutly you may worship God in general when you come to Church, you do not in so strict a sense worship *as Christians*, unless you partake in the bread

and wine, which represent the body and blood of Christ ; and thus perform that act, which Christ has made a mark of distinction to his followers.

The partaking in the holy communion is also a duty, which you owe to yourselves, on account of the benefits which you may receive from it ; not only that benefit, which may be expected by all, who generally fulfil God's commandments ; but those particular benefits, which follow upon a hearty and conscientious performance of this.

It is the best method, that you can take, towards bettering your lives and conversations ; towards making you forsake your sins, and improve in godliness and charity. And this it is, in its natural effect upon those who properly partake in it. For it seems impossible but that a person, who comes to the Lord's table, and who seriously meditates, as every one who does come ought to do, upon the exceeding great love of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, in laying down his life for the sake of him and of all mankind ; it seems impossible, I say, but that a person, who seriously thinks on these things, must feel more strongly disposed to show his gratitude to his Saviour by keeping his commandments, and by being kind and charitable to his neighbour.

Nor is it the same thing, whether you think upon these things at the Lord's table or in any other place ; because of the supernatural assist-

ance, “the inward spiritual grace,” which is promised by our Saviour to those who partake in the holy communion. Our Saviour has told us, that “his flesh is meat indeed, and his blood is drink indeed¹ ;” that is, that his flesh and blood, “which are verily and indeed taken and received by the faithful in the Lord’s Supper,” are (as our Catechism well expresses it) for “the strengthening and refreshing of our souls, as our bodies are” strengthened and refreshed by “bread and wine.”

The partaking in the Lord’s Supper is also a necessary method for you to follow, if you would arrive at everlasting happiness. “Verily, verily, I say unto you”—these are the words of our blessed Lord himself ;—“except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day² .” So that besides all the other motives, which should weigh with you towards making you devout and worthy partakers at the Lord’s table, you ought to reflect most seriously, that if you do not choose to partake, you can have no reason to expect that you will be saved and happy in heaven. This, in fact, is the way, by which the testament or cove-

¹ John vi. 55.

² John vi. 53, 54.

nant between Christ and you, is sealed and made good. At Baptism you were admitted into covenant with God ; when you received from him the promise of forgiveness of sins, and everlasting happiness ; and engaged on your part “ obediently to keep his holy will and commandments, and to walk in the same all the days of your life.” If you will perform your part of the covenant, if you will “ eat the flesh and drink the blood” of Christ, and endeavour to live in a suitable manner, (for that must always be understood, when we speak of the benefits of receiving the Lord’s Supper ;) you may then be assured that, as Christ “ is faithful who promised ¹,” he will perform his part of the covenant, and “ raise you up at the last day.” If you will not perform your part, if you will not “ eat his flesh and drink his blood,” when they are offered you, you cannot expect him to perform his part. Nay, you must expect punishment for disobeying his commandment ; and do indeed challenge and provoke him to give you over to eternal death, inasmuch as you obstinately refuse to do that, which he points out as the means of life. For “ except ye eat the flesh of Christ, and drink his blood, you have no life in you.”

But some man will perhaps say, I am too

¹ Heb. x. 23.

ignorant ; and another perhaps will say, I am not fit by reason of my infirmities, to come to the Lord's table. If you mean to say, that you know nothing at all about your religion, or that you are living in the habitual commission of sins, which you will not repent of and forsake ; you then say what is very true ; and you certainly have not the least right to come to that holy table. But I rather am willing to hope, that when you employ these excuses, you are under a mistake as to what is required of those, who would partake in the Lord's Supper.

In the Catechism, which cannot be too strongly recommended to your serious and repeated consideration, you will find the things, which are required, distinctly and clearly explained. You are there told, that before you come to the Lord's table, you are to “ examine yourselves, whether you repent you truly of your former sins ; and steadfastly purpose to lead a new life ;—whether you have a lively faith in God's mercy through Christ, with a thankful remembrance of his death ;—and whether you are in charity with all men.”

In the first place then you are to examine, whether you are really sorry for the sins which you have committed in your past life :—you are to confess them to God ; to pray of him to pardon them ; to intreat his assistance, that you may be able to forsake them ;—and you are then to

examine, whether you can resolve within yourselves to forsake them ; can steadfastly purpose to lead a new life, in other words, to live like Christians for the future ; and thus, whilst you confess your sins and say, that you repent of them, whether you can resolve to “bring forth fruits meet for repentance¹.”

In the next place you are to examine, whether you believe what you read in the Bible yourselves, or what you hear read from it at Church ; particularly whether you believe, that the mercy of God is extended to penitent sinners by virtue of the death of Jesus Christ ; whether you trust for pardon from God and future happiness, not upon any works or merits of your own, but upon the merits of Christ ; and whether you give him hearty thanks, for the blessings which he has purchased by his death for you and for all mankind.

In the third and last place you are to examine, whether you feel such a spirit of good-will towards all men, as would lead you to do for the service of any one, whatever might be in your power ;—whether, in case of your having offended or injured your neighbour, you are willing to make him all the satisfaction that you can ;—and whether, in case of your having been offended or injured by him, you are ready to forgive him from

¹ Matt. iii. 8.

the bottom of your heart, “as you would have forgiveness of your offences at God’s hand.”

Such are the things necessary for him, who would worthily partake in the Lord’s Supper. You see then, that you may be very ignorant, and very subject to infirmity, (and God knows, that we all are so!) and yet that you may not be unfit to partake in it. For provided that you heartily repent of and endeavour to forsake every sinful habit, all bad words, all impure thoughts, and all evil actions ;—provided you believe the great articles of the Christian faith, with an humble and thankful heart ;—and provided you be kind and merciful to your neighbour, *forgiving* his trespasses although you may not be able to *forget* them ;—you do all that can be required of the greatest number of Christians, who can never be fit to go to the Lord’s table, if they be not rendered fit by a well-disposed and honest heart, conscious of its own sinfulness ; thankful for God’s mercies through Christ ; and desirous, to the best of its knowledge and ability, of keeping God’s commandments.

But perhaps you think, that it is better not to partake in the Lord’s Supper, than to incur the sin and the punishment of partaking in it unworthily : alarmed, it may be, by that declaration of St. Paul, “He that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself.”

Now, as to this passage, it may first be observed, that those amongst us, who are so fearful of coming to the holy communion, are in no danger of "receiving unworthily" in the Apostle's meaning. For the unworthy receiving, which he so severely censures in the Corinthians, was their approaching to the Lord's table with so improper a sense of the act they were performing, that, in his words, "they did not discern the Lord's body ;" or, according to his meaning, they made no distinction between the bread of the sacrament, and common food. Such at that time was the condition of the Corinthians, that when they met together to receive the sacrament, which in those days was usually preceded by a common feast of rich and poor together, they used the Church more as a place of riot and intemperance, than as the house of God. "When ye come together in one place," saith the indignant Apostle, "this is not to eat the Lord's Supper. For in eating every one takes before other his own supper, and one is hungry, and another is drunken. What ! have ye not houses to eat and drink in ; or despise ye the Church of God ? What shall I say of you ? shall I praise you in this ? I praise you not." Such is the remonstrance of St. Paul : and it is upon such unworthy, irreverent, and profane partakers in the Lord's Supper, as those whom he thus

describes, that he pronounces that formidable censure ; “ He that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, because he discerneth not the Lord’s body.” But surely no one of you, who are so fearful of coming to the holy communion, can be in any danger of treating it with such profanation as this.

But secondly, the damnation denounced by St. Paul is not perhaps so dreadful as it is commonly apprehended. For all that he says, according to the force of the original text, amounts to this : “ He that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh *judgment* to himself ;” meaning thereby, that he who thus profanes our Lord’s institution, draws down severe judgments from God upon his head ; such judgments, as are immediately after specified ; “ For this cause many are weak and sickly amongst you, and many sleep.” But he does not denounce everlasting damnation, as is sometimes apprehended, on the unworthy receiver : rather on the contrary he gives us to understand very differently of the judgment actually intended, where he says, that “ when we are” thus “ judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.”

But further : admitting that St. Paul in these words means “ damnation” in our usual sense ; admitting also, that his threats are directed

against those, who partake in the Lord's Supper in any way "unworthily:" this will be a weighty reason, why we should endeavour to fit ourselves for partaking in it worthily; but no reason at all, why we should withdraw ourselves from partaking. And it is a question, which I would suggest to your consideration, whether, when the sin of coming to the Lord's table unworthily is allowed to be as great and as damnable, as it can reasonably be supposed to be, the sin of totally withdrawing from it is not greater and more damnable? whether, if he, who partakes in the Lord's Supper unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, he, that partakes not at all, is not so far from bettering his condition, that he increaseth his damnation?—To partake in this holy mystery is known to be a duty enjoined by Christ: and it is an acknowledged truth, that there is greater sin in omitting a known duty altogether, than in performing that duty as well as we can, though after all with much unworthiness.

I would add one word of advice to those amongst you, who think themselves too young to engage in so solemn and serious a business, as is that of the Lord's Supper.

If you are old enough to have been confirmed, and to understand the nature and intent of this holy sacrament, you are old enough to partake in

it ; for the benefits of it are not confined to the aged and infirm.—If you think that youth is too light and heedless to come to the Lord's holy table ; consider on the other hand, that, by coming thither, if you come with the temper with which you ought to come, you may be improved in steadiness and soberness.—If you think, that youth is more exposed to temptation, and therefore in greater danger of committing sin ; consider on the other hand, that it has therefore more need of that grace and assistance, which the holy communion is designed and qualified to give.—If you think that it is of no importance, whether or not you partake in it at present, because you shall have time enough, in which to do it hereafter ; consider, I pray you, the uncertainty of human life ; and of how great moment it is, that you should, as soon as possible, put yourselves into a way by God's grace of ensuring a better and a heavenly life. The truth is, that which is good to be done, cannot be done too soon ; and if it is neglected to be done early, it will frequently happen that it will not be done at all. The reason why many middle-aged and elderly persons, although otherwise soberly and seriously disposed, are not regular in attending the Lord's Supper, most probably is, because they were not brought up in the habit of doing it, when they were young.

If they had once begun in that way, I doubt whether they would ever have quitted it. The instruction of the wise man upon this point is well worthy of your attention ; “ Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth¹ ;” and the reason of it is given in another place where it is said, “ Train up a child in the way he should go ; and, when he is old, he will not depart from it². ”

If you have given attention to what I have been now saying, you will have perceived it to be my wish to awaken the thoughtless amongst you to a sense of your duty to put yourselves into a condition of being worthy partakers in the Lord's Supper, by insisting upon the necessity you are under of doing so, if you would be faithful to your Saviour, and true to your own interest. You will also have understood me to say, that neither a sense of the common infirmities of your nature, nor your ignorance, nor your youth, is a sufficient reason for absenting yourselves from the Lord's table, provided you do your best to live a godly, sober, and honest life, in obedience to God's commandments, and from a sense of duty and gratitude to him.

If any one of you be a dissipated and careless

¹ Eccl. xii. 1.

¹ Prov. xxii. 6.

liver, or an habitual and hardened sinner, I bid him *not* to come to the Lord's table : for such an one is not fit to come ; nor can he be rendered fit, until he repent him truly of his former sins, and steadfastly purpose to lead a new life : but I warn him at the same time to reflect, that the same things which make him unfit to partake of that holy communion here, must also make him unfit for the kingdom of heaven. If any one, notwithstanding what has been now said, hath still any fears and scruples with regard to partaking, I intreat him to follow the counsel of the Church, and to come to me, or to any other minister, in whose discretion and learning he may confide, and open his grief, in order to its being examined and removed. In the mean time, to all of you in general, who have on your conscience no sin which you will not forsake, and no scruple, which you cannot yourselves remove, I address the language of our Church in one of her admirable exhortations ; and, " according to mine office, I bid you in the name of God, I call you in Christ's behalf, I exhort you, as ye love your own salvation, that ye will be partakers of this holy communion." Think then upon these things, I earnestly pray you, all ye who have hitherto neglected this holy sacrament through thoughtlessness and indifference. Rouse your-

selves from that insensibility, into which you are sunk. Think that every feeling of gratitude and of duty to your blessed Lord calls upon you for obedience to his commandment; think that you are called upon for the same obedience by a concern for your own interest, by all the regard which you have for the present and future welfare of your souls. Strive to fit yourselves, with the help of God's Holy Spirit, for partaking worthily in that holy sacrament; then "draw near to the Lord's table with faith," and in the full assurance, that he will assist your sincere endeavours, and will hereafter most plentifully reward them. But if you will obstinately persist in your indifference to his commandment, and will not perform the conditions, which he has ordained for your salvation; remember, that you persist at your own peril. It is your own act, if you now refuse to come to his table, when the Lord is graciously pleased to invite you: and it will therefore be your own fault, if the approach to his table in heaven shall be shut against you; and if, when you cry, "Lord, Lord, open to us," he shall answer you in those dreadful words, "Depart from me, I know you not!"—God forbid that these terrible words should be used to any one of you, my brethren! nay rather may he give you his preventing and

assisting grace, that you may become and continue worthy partakers of Christ's body and blood ; in which if you do not worthily partake, " you have no life in you ;" but if you do, " you have in you eternal life," and Christ " will raise you up at the last day."

SERMON XXVII.

THE DUTY AND ADVANTAGE OF CHURCH COMMUNION.

Acts iv. 32. and ii. 46, 47.

And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul :—

And they continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart,

Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the Church daily such as should be saved.

How delightful is the picture, here drawn by the Evangelist, of the spirit of unity, which prevailed among the members of the Christian Church at the season of its first establishment ! How truly did they exemplify in their conduct that beautiful exclamation of the Psalmist, “ Behold, how good and joyful a thing it is, brethren, to dwell together in unity¹ ! ”

¹ Psalm cxxxiii. 1.

But this truly Christian spirit, which made men “of one heart and of one soul;” this truly Christian practice of “all believers being together, and continuing daily with one accord in the temple,” was but of short duration. It was to no purpose, that our blessed Lord had commanded his disciples, to “love one another¹;” and had earnestly prayed his Father “for them that should believe on him, that they all might be one²:”—it was to no purpose, that his holy Apostles most fervently enforced the same affection and union; that St. Peter exhorted the Christian converts to “greet one another with a kiss of charity³;” that St. John cautioned his followers against such as would “seduce them from the truth⁴;” that St. Jude warned believers to beware of “those who separate themselves⁵;” and that St. Paul more particularly in the most earnest manner repeatedly insisted upon the same point; “beseeching” the Corinthians “in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, that they would all speak the same thing, and that there might be no divisions among them⁶;” intreating the Ephesians, that they would “forbear one another in love, and endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace⁷;” and praying

¹ John xv. 12.² John xvii. 20, 21³ 1 Pet. v. 14.⁴ 1 John ii. 26.⁵ Jude 19.⁶ 1 Cor. i. 10, 11.⁷ Eph. iv. 3.

to God, in behalf of the Romans, to “grant them to be like-minded one towards another according to Christ Jesus ; that they might with one mind and one mouth glorify God¹.” The corrupt and perverse propensities of human nature too soon prevailed, in opposition to the exhortations of the Apostles, and to the commandments of their Lord. “Despite was done unto the Spirit” of truth and love. Heresies and schisms ; unsound opinions, and unreasonable divisions too soon broke the unity of the Church ; and the prediction of our Saviour was too fatally fulfilled, that he “came not to send peace on earth, but a sword².”

If then the unity and peace of the Church were thus distracted in the age of the Apostles, when the Church was under the government of men, who had received their authority immediately from Christ, and whose ministry was attested by the seal of miraculous power ; much as we may be grieved, we have no reason to be surprised, at divisions among Christians in subsequent ages ; when the governors of the Church no longer derive their authority immediately from Christ, although in direct and unbroken succession from his Apostles ; and when they are no

¹ Rom. xv. 5.

² Matt. x. 34.

longer endowed with extraordinary power, by which to attest and support their authority.

But however this consideration may lessen our surprise at the existence of divisions in the Church; it does not alter the nature of such divisions, nor lessen the guilt of those who cause them. If Schism, or an unreasonable separation from the Church, be in itself sinful; it is sinful at one time as well as at another: as well when the Church is under the government of the legitimate successors of the Apostles, as when it was under the government of the Apostles themselves: as well after the Church has been established eighteen hundred years, as at the period immediately succeeding its establishment. Allowing that "it must needs be that offences come," still our blessed Saviour teaches us to conclude, that there must be "woe to that man, by whom the offence cometh¹."

It is our lot to be cast on times, remarkable for many strange peculiarities, both in opinion and in practice; for no one perhaps more remarkable than for a general spirit of insubordination and licentiousness in matters of Church discipline and Church union. So universally indeed has this spirit been disseminated, that

¹ Matt. xviii. 7.

Schism, even in the estimation of many professed members of the established Church, is a sin of small account ; although that Church herself condemns it as explicitly, and instructs all her members to deprecate it as earnestly, as any of the most heinous sins. It may be therefore no unseasonable task, if I endeavour with God's blessing to show you, 1st, The general sinfulness of Schism, or an unreasonable separation from the Church ; and 2dly, the benefits, to be derived individually from a conscientious communion with it. It is necessary to premise that I take for granted, that the established Church of England is a true branch of the Church of Christ : apprehending, as I do, that the error of the modern separatists in general does not arise so much from a positive objection upon principle to the national Church ; as from an imaginary liberty, by which they suppose themselves to be exempted from all obligation to Church communion ; and authorized to attach themselves to any religious society, or to form new ones, as their inclination may direct.

I. First then, as to the general sinfulness of an unreasonable separation from the Church.

And here, that we may not seem to be proceeding without the express warrant of holy Scripture, let it be observed in the outset, that we have in di-

rect terms authority for asserting the sinfulness of Schism.

“Ye are yet carnal,” says St. Paul to the Corinthians: “for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men¹?” The divisions, here condemned by the Apostle, were of a religious character: they consisted in “one saying, I am of Paul, and another, I am of Apollos;” that is, in the Corinthians forming separate parties or communions; and attaching themselves at will to particular teachers, instead of uniting in one Christian communion. And these divisions St. Paul considers as “carnal;” or (according to his enumeration in another place) among “the works of the flesh;” such as “adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, murders, drunkenness, revellings: of which,” he adds, “I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God².”

“The time will come,” says the same Apostle to Timothy, whom he addresses as Bishop of the Church of the Ephesians; “The time will come, when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts they shall heap to themselves

¹ 1 Cor. iii. 3.

² Gal. v. 19. 21.

teachers, having itching ears. And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables¹." Here the particular species of Schism in the offenders is their choosing for themselves teachers, such as, instead of preaching to them the sound word of God, would flatter their corrupt opinions and inclinations: and the nature of their offence is said to be an indulgence of their "lusts;" agreeably to the former sentence of the same Apostle, where he describes Schism as a "work of the flesh."

"The Lord reserves the unjust," saith St. Peter, "unto the day of judgment to be punished; but chiefly them that walk after the flesh, in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government. Presumptuous are they, self-willed: they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities²." Who now are these "unrighteous," of whom the indignant Apostle complains? The question is best answered by a reference to St. Jude; where, speaking also of those "filthy dreamers, who despise dominion, and speak evil of dignities,"—"Woe unto them," continues he; "for they have perished in the gainsaying of Core³." The gainsaying of Core, as it is related in the 16th chapter of Numbers, consisted in his opposition to the spiritual authority of Aaron in the

¹ 2 Tim. iv. 3.

² 2 Pet. ii. 10.

³ Jude 8, 11.

Jewish Church ; and in a factious endeavour to raise himself to that degree of authority in the Church, which Aaron held by commission from the Most High. The attempt, in its original form, was visited by a most awful punishment from the Almighty ; its counterpart in the Christian Church was most severely reprobated by the Apostle, expressly as a species of Schism ; “ These,” saith he, “ be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit ¹.”

Such plain authorities have we from the word of Truth, to support us in directly asserting the sinfulness of Schism. Its sinfulness will moreover appear, if we consider its nature and consequences.

The first evil then, which occurs to us in considering the nature of Schism, is that it immediately and inevitably destroys the unity of the Church.

And here let it not be supposed, that, in speaking of the unity of the Church, I am raising a phantom to deter the ignorant from an action in itself indifferent. Little indeed can he be acquainted with the general tenor, or with particular passages of the Gospel, who is not aware that such unity is there most earnestly recommended and enforced. Else, why did our blessed Re-

¹ Jude 19.

deemer so anxiously press upon his disciples his last, and almost his dying intreaty, that they would “love one another?” Why did he thus pray for his Apostles in particular; “Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are?” And why did he extend his prayer to the whole body of future Christians in general; “Neither pray I for these” my present disciples “alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us¹?” Why did St. Paul thus solemnly adjure the Church of the Corinthians; “I beseech you, brethren, by the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you²?” And why did he pray God to grant to the Romans, that they might not only “with one mind,” but “with one mouth” also “glorify God³?” Surely it is not to be supposed, that either our blessed Lord or his holy Apostle, would have been thus solemn and impressive upon a case of trifling or of doubtful importance:—why then did they upon this subject employ this more than usual solemnity of manner, but because they were anxious to impress

¹ John xvii. 11, 20, 21.² 1 Cor. i. 10.³ Rom. xv. 6.

upon the minds of believers the incalculable importance of preserving unbroken the unity of the Church? The Church is represented in the Gospel under the images of a family, a city, and a kingdom: and it is the declaration of the Founder of the Church himself, that “every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house, divided against itself, shall not stand¹.” To break the unity of the Church then, by introducing causeless divisions into it, is to tend to desolate and overthrow it. And surely that must be sinful, which can tend to the destruction and desolation of that goodly structure, which “is built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together, groweth unto a holy temple in the Lord².”

We are assured indeed, blessed be God! that “the Church is founded upon a rock, and that the gates of hell shall not prevail against it³.” But although this consideration wonderfully exalts the goodness and providence of God, it does not in any degree diminish the sinfulness of Schism: the necessary effect of which is to break the unity of the Church; and the natural conse-

Matt. xii. 25

² Eph. ii. 20—22.

³ Matt. xvi. 18.

quence of that disunion is a tendency to overthrow it.

Internal divisions have at all times a natural tendency to overthrow any society, into which they are admitted : and whenever they have prevailed to a considerable extent, they have been proved to be more pernicious than the most daring assaults of outward enemies. In the same manner the attacks of outward assailants have never been productive of so much injury to the cause of the Christian Faith, as the inward schisms and dissensions of Christians.

There are indeed two particular ways, in which Schism is peculiarly pernicious to true religion. I mean, the occasion, which it gives for heresies and corrupt opinions among the professors of Christianity ; and the encouragement supplied by it to scepticism and unbelief.

For, in the first place, as the Church is “ the candlestick ” that holds and preserves the light ¹, and “ the ground and pillar of the truth ² ; ” as long as men continue in her communion, they will generally be disposed to be guided by her in doubtful cases ; by being in one body, they naturally become of one spirit ; or, in other words, as they agree in the unity of Church communion, they agree also in unity of faith. But when they

¹ Rev. i. 20.

² 1 Tim. iii. 15.

separate themselves from the communion of the Church, the case becomes very different also with regard to their belief. They now reject, what they before looked to as their light and their guide : they no longer have recourse to the established Ministry, at whose mouth they before accustomed themselves to seek the law : “ tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine ¹,” they now trust to their own private and unassisted interpretation of Scripture, which their previous habits and studies have very imperfectly qualified them to form ; or they are content to hear it interpreted by some unauthorized teacher, who is perhaps little better qualified than themselves, and who not unfrequently “ wrests ²” and distorts the word of God, that he may break it down to a compliance with the prejudices of his hearers, or adapt it to his own favourite views. For it should be observed, that the generality of those persons, who take the lead in separation from the Church, soon become anxious to mark their separation by some characteristical difference, not only in practice, but in doctrine.

Thus a diversity of opinions is rapidly engendered ; and wherever there is a diversity of opinions, some must of necessity be false and un-

¹ Eph. iv. 14.

² 2 Pet. iii. 16.

sound. And thus it is, that heretical and corrupt doctrines are the continual fruit of schismatical practices : an assertion, which needs no example by way of proof to any one, who is moderately acquainted with the history of the Christian Church in general, or with that of our own Church in particular : especially in those ever to be lamented times of civil as well as religious discord, which agitated this country about one hundred and fifty years ago ; and (what is before every one's eyes) in the present alarming days of religious licentiousness and insubordination.

At the same time that Schism thus gives occasion for heresies in the Church, it also affords encouragement to the sceptic, and the infidel ; to him who doubts, and to him who denies, the truth of revelation. Reason with the deist about his danger in neglecting the Gospel ; and he will probably reply, that he thinks it his best and safest way to continue to walk in the light of natural religion, so long as the dissensions among Christians make it impossible for him to ascertain, to what Church obedience is due, or in what creed he is to look for the truth.

The argument, though not sound, is specious ; and is calculated to confirm a man in an error, which he may have previously conceived. And such has been the result, from the first establishment of Christianity down to the present day, in

which we witness a most deplorable infidelity, or at least indifference with regard to matters of religion. The separatist therefore would do well to consider, whether there must not be something sinful in the nature of those divisions, the tendency of which is to diminish the number of believers, and in consequence the glory of God ; and the effect of which may be to exclude many souls from salvation.

We thus see the sinfulness of Schism instanced in its tendency to injure the cause of pure Christianity, by encouraging heresy and unbelief. Nor is it less noxious in its effect upon the spirit of God's " most excellent gift of charity, the very bond of peace and of all virtues, without which whosoever liveth is counted dead before God ¹."

There is not any thing, which contributes more to unite men, than an agreement in religious worship. They then " take sweet counsel together," when they " walk in the house of God as friends ²." On the other hand, there is not any thing, which so thoroughly divides them, and keeps them so far asunder, as religious differences. For those persons, who think with any seriousness upon religion, are of the same mind in thinking it their most important concern : and it is an acknowledged

¹ Collect for Quinquagesima.

² Psalm lv. 14.

truth, that the heat, with which any matter is disputed, is generally in proportion to the supposed importance of the matter in dispute. Thus, upon this general principle, the influence of Schism is most hurtful to the comfort and well-being of society ; by loosening or breaking that charity, which should subsist in the ordinary intercourse between man and man ; and that affection, which should in a more especial manner bind families together.

More particularly have we cause to lament this evil in the case of some modern sects ; the leaders of which, addressing themselves more pointedly to the young, the inexperienced, and the unlearned, persuade them that they alone are the just, the excellent of the earth, saints, and the highly-favoured of heaven. Thus elated with a presumptuous opinion of their own holiness, and moreover taught to consider their superiors as objects of divine anger and rejection, the deluded followers are led to shut out from their hearts the love of man, in order that they may show, what they are instructed to consider, their love of God. Hence children have been found to rise up against their parents, and servants against their masters, declaring them to be hypocrites and heirs of eternal damnation.

In the mean time that, if possible, more sacred tie, which should ever be preserved inviolate

between the regular minister and his parishioners, it is the notorious and avowed object of many separatists to weaken and dissolve. It is not my present purpose to expose the misrepresentations and falsehoods, to which modern schismatics have had recourse for the attainment of this object : reviling the whole body of the established clergy in one sweeping sentence of condemnation, as hireling priests ; wolves in sheep's clothing ; blind leaders of the blind ; corrupt in doctrine and practice ; destitute of divine grace and of every ministerial qualification. By such unwarrantable and unchristian means, it is to be feared that they sometimes attain their end, and succeed in exciting aversion and contempt for the ministers of the established Church. But I mention it as a striking instance of the sinfulness of Schism, in thus breaking the bonds of Christian charity ; of charity, which is pronounced by an Apostle to be " more excellent " ¹ than all the spiritual gifts, with which the enthusiast believes, and the hypocrite pretends, that he is endowed ; of charity, concerning which we have the same inspired testimony, that it " doth not behave itself unseemly," that it " thinketh no evil," and that it " rejoiceth in the truth " ².

But further : Schism is not only sinful for the

¹ 1 Cor. xii. 31.

² 1 Cor. xiii. 5, 6.

reasons, that have been already mentioned, but as it is a direct violation of the divine command. This might be proved from passages, already recited in the present discourse, wherein we have heard our Saviour and his Apostle insisting upon the duty of avoiding divisions, and maintaining unity, in the Church. But there are in particular two other passages, which bear so immediately upon this point, that we might be content to leave the whole question for their decision.

Our blessed Lord, having given directions to his disciples concerning their conduct towards an offending brother, concludes with this injunction: "Tell it unto the Church: but if he neglect to hear the Church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican ¹." "Obey them that have the rule over you," says the Apostle, "and submit yourselves; for they watch for your souls, as they that must give an account ²." In the latter of these passages, obedience to our spiritual rulers is commanded by an inspired Apostle: and in the former, neglect of the authority and ordinances of the Church is forbidden and reprobated by our Lord himself. Disobedience then to our spiritual rulers, and neglect of the authority of the Church, are sinful, inasmuch

¹ Matt. xviii. 17.

² Heb. xiii. 17.

as they violate the divine commandment : and believing, as we cannot do otherwise than believe, that they are our spiritual rulers, who derive their authority by a continued succession from the Apostles, and are called unto and constituted in their office in a regular and peaceable way, agreeable to the institution of God and the constant practice of his Church ; and that that is the Church, which is under the government of such spiritual rulers ; we cannot do otherwise than believe also, that the separatist from the Church of England is guilty of the act of transgressing the commandment, and is of course answerable for the sin.

II. And so I proceed to consider, secondly, the benefits to be individually derived from a conscientious communion with the Church.

It is the general character of those revelations of his will, which God has made known to mankind, that the interest of man is closely connected by them with his duty. For our heavenly Father, at the same time that he lays his commandments upon us, accompanies them with the promise of the greatest rewards, if we will obey them. “ If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments¹. ”

The natural effect of this connexion between

¹ Matt. xix. 17.

our interest and our duty should appear to be, a greater readiness on our part to perform our duty. We should indeed, as the creatures and dependents of God, have been bound to do what he willed, solely because he willed it, had he not been graciously pleased to supply us with other motives for obedience. But obedience then becomes more delightful, when it is attended by the assured hope of our attaining those good things, which God hath prepared for them that love him, and that show their love by obeying him.

Having then, as I trust, satisfactorily shown, that it is our duty to persevere in communion with the established Church, as a true branch of the Church of Christ; in order to convince you that the same is also for our interest, it might be sufficient to rest the matter upon this general ground; that as unity is commanded in the Church, and Schism forbidden; he who avoids the latter, and contributes all he can to the maintenance of the former, keeps the commandment, and is therefore by God's mercy generally entitled to the promise. But the peculiar advantage, attending upon a conscientious communion with the Church, is so little inquired into, and is (I apprehend) so little understood in the present day, that it becomes necessary from a due regard to the importance of the subject, to bring this advantage more fully under review.

It is not necessary upon the present occasion to set forth at length, how by the fall of Adam, operating to the corruption of our nature, we became children of disobedience, children of wrath, and heirs of everlasting misery : nor how, by the sacrifice of Christ and by virtue of his righteousness, we are enabled to become children of grace, and inheritors of the kingdom of heaven. Let it suffice to state also, as a matter out of the reach of contradiction or dispute, that, as our blessed Redeemer was pleased to lay down his life as a propitiation for our sins, so he appointed certain means, by which we are to attain that grace here, and that salvation hereafter, which he hath purchased for us by his death.

For some of these means of grace and salvation we have not far to look. We turn to the 16th chapter of St. Mark's Gospel, and find our Saviour delivering the following promise : " He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved." Here then we see the sacrament of Baptism instituted by our Saviour, as a mean whereby we may be saved. We turn also to the 22d chapter of St. Luke, and find our Saviour instituting the sacrament of his body and blood ; and to the 6th chapter of St. John, and hear him again promising, " Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life." So that here we have another sacrament, ordained by our Saviour,

as another mean of salvation. And the use of Baptism being to put us into the road to heaven, the use of the Lord's Supper is, to remind, and encourage, and assist us to continue in it.

The sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper being thus appointed by our Saviour himself, as the means of grace and salvation, who would not wish to be a partaker in them? For who would not wish to be in a state of grace and favour, rather than of wrath and displeasure, with God? And who would not wish to be an inheritor of the joys of heaven, rather than of the torments of hell?

It becomes then a matter of infinite importance for us to consider, how we are to be made partakers of these holy sacraments; and to what persons we are to apply, in order that we may partake of them.

If now we look to the conclusion of St. Matthew's Gospel, we shall find our Saviour addressing his Apostles in the following words: "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." Authority therefore to administer the sacrament of Baptism was given to the Apostles by Him, by whom Baptism was ordained.

If again we look to the 22d chapter of St.

Luke, we shall find our Saviour, at the institution of the holy communion, blessing and giving the bread and wine to his Apostles, and at the same time addressing them with this commandment, “Do this, in remembrance of me.” The Apostles therefore received authority to administer the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper also from Him, who instituted the sacrament.

Thus we see our blessed Saviour himself, not only appointing the means, by which mankind were to be saved, but also appointing the persons, through whom those means were to be administered.

Nor had he in this appointment a view to those times only, in which the appointment was made; but he designed that it should be extended to all future ages; for so must we understand the words, which he pronounced, immediately after giving his Apostles their authority to baptize: “Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.”—A promise this, which cannot be supposed to have respect to the persons of the Apostles alone, who in the common course of nature were soon to be taken from the world, to the end of which the promise itself was to extend.

If then the promise given by our Saviour to his Apostles, that “he would be with them alway, even unto the end of the world,” cannot

be understood as having respect to the persons of the Apostles alone ; it is next to be inquired, to whom, besides the Apostles, did the promise of our Saviour extend ? And who are they, to whom is derived the authority of administering the sacraments, the administration of which he at first committed to his Apostles ?

And here again have we occasion to refer to another passage, in which our Saviour addresses himself to the same holy men : “ As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you¹. ” The full meaning of which commission we understand to be, “ As my Father hath sent me ” to preach the Gospel, and hath given me power and authority to send you ; “ even so do I send you ” upon the same mission, and give you power and authority to send others. Such appears to be the plain and obvious meaning of these words of Christ to his Apostles. In conformity with this meaning the Apostles, who were themselves holy men and full of the Holy Ghost, did send other persons ; to whom again they gave power and authority to send others ; through whom the office of ministers of the Gospel has been handed down in regular and uninterrupted succession from the Apostles to the present time. And hence we perceive who are the persons, with whom our

¹ John xx. 21.

Saviour promised that he would be “alway, even unto the end of the world;” namely, those persons, who should be employed in the administration of the means of grace provided in the Gospel, by a commission derived regularly from the Apostles, and through the Apostles from Himself.

We are now enabled to estimate with sufficient accuracy the great advantage attending a conscientious communion with the Church: and we perceive it to be the same with that spoken of by the Evangelist in the text, where it is said, that “the Lord added unto the Church such as should be saved:” because our Saviour has annexed the promise of salvation and eternal life to Baptism and the Lord’s Supper duly administered according to his ordinance; and because when he had sent his Apostles to administer these means of salvation, and had given them authority to send others in the same manner, he promised that he would be alway with them in their ministry, and of course that their ministry should be effectual.

When however, relying upon these promises, and upon the assurance that “he is faithful who promised,” we profess our unshaken belief, that those persons, who persevere in conscientious communion with the Church, are in the sure road to salvation; we are not to be understood

as delivering an opinion, that salvation will be withheld from those, who conscientiously separate from the Church. God forbid, that we should presume to set bounds to the infinite mercy of God ! Thus much, however, I conceive that I may safely say ; that no promise of salvation appears to be given in Scripture to those persons, who are not in the Church. The free mercy of God will perhaps make that sacrament effectual, which is administered by a layman or an irregularly ordained minister. Salvation will perhaps be freely extended to those persons, who do not seek it by persevering in communion with the Church. But on the other hand, we have the promise of the God of truth, that the sacrament, which is administered by him, who acts with authority from Christ, shall be effectual as the means of saving those who faithfully partake in it.

The case may be thus shortly stated. Two roads are set before you : the former will unquestionably lead you to salvation, if it be steadfastly and invariably pursued ; the latter may, or may not, lead you to the same point :—the former is provided and pointed out to you by God ; the latter is the creation of fallible man :—if you take the former, you are proceeding in obedience to God's will ; if you prefer the latter, it is in compliance with your own. On such

a comparison it should seem, that there can be no question, which is the safer and more eligible road : for on the one side there is no doubt whatever ; on the other there is : to which should be added the danger incurred by those persons, who by separating themselves unreasonably from a true branch of the Church of Christ, become guilty of the sin, and are exposed to the consequences, of Schism. Here however every man must be left to judge and act for himself ; and it will be to his own loss, if he judges and acts wrong. For my own part, that I may adopt the sentiment of a late pious and learned Clergyman, “ I would not for the whole world, (unworthy as I am ;) I say I would not for the whole world and all the kingdoms of it, be in doubt whether I was translated or not into the true Church of Jesus Christ. I would not be in doubt, whether I have the sacraments, or whether I have them not.” And I heartily thank God for making me a member of the Church of England, which I have no doubt so administers the sacraments, that they are effectual and sufficient for the present grace and future salvation of every one, who receives them with an honest and true heart.

In laying these remarks before you, I trust that I am not acting an unchristian part towards those, who separate from our communion. To judge of men’s motives with asperity, to speak of

their errors with intemperance, or to cherish uncharitable sentiments towards them because their opinions or practices differ from our own, were to betray a spirit unworthy of a follower of the meek and lowly Jesus. But I know of no consideration, which should induce us to refrain from enforcing a duty, which we believe to be clearly prescribed in Scripture, or from deprecating a sin, which we believe to be as clearly forbidden, out of real or pretended tenderness for those, who violate the duty and commit the sin. To admit such a principle as this, would be to supersede the office of the preacher of the Gospel ; inasmuch as it would be establishing the example of others as the rule of human conduct, instead of referring men to the revealed will of God.

According to the revelation of that will in God's holy word, I apprehend religious union among Christians to be commanded, and divisions among them to be prohibited, as clearly as on the one hand any acknowledged duty, or on the other any acknowledged sin whatsoever. To impress or to establish the same conviction on your minds, has been the aim of the foregoing discourse. And happy indeed should I esteem myself, in being made the humble instrument of Providence, to confirm those among you who uniformly tread in the right way, and to recal

those, (if any such there be,) who occasionally depart from it : that so amidst the divisions and confusion of the Christian Church, we might, by the good pleasure of God, exhibit the goodly spectacle of “brethren dwelling together in unity!” that we might be steadfast in “speaking the same thing,” in “glorifying God with one mind and with one mouth,” in avoiding “those that separate themselves,” and in maintaining a conscientious obedience and submission to them that are appointed by God to have the spiritual rule over us ! and finally, that “endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace,” we might continue to be “of one body and of one spirit, even as we are all called in one hope of our calling ;” and as we have all “one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in us all¹!”

To Him, in the unity of his Son and Holy Spirit, God blessed for evermore, be all honour and glory!

¹ Eph. iv. 5.

S E R M O N XXVIII.

SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS NO PRIVILEGE FOR SIN ;
EXEMPLIFIED IN THE PUNISHMENT OF THE
JEWS IN THE WILDERNESS.

1 COR. x. 11, 12.

Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples ; and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.

Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.

THE writings of the Old Testament demand our very attentive perusal upon various accounts. One, and that not the least important, is, that they supply us with memorable examples of the wrath of God conspicuously manifested in the punishment of sinners ; that they give us evidence of his strict impartiality in taking vengeance for crimes, of whatever description be the criminal ; and are thus calculated to convince us of this undoubted truth, that however greatly a man may esteem himself favoured by the

Almighty, he has no ground for hoping that he shall enjoy the continuance of God's favour, and avoid the effects of his indignation, if he be disobedient to the divine commandments.

With this intent we hear St. Paul, in the passage preceding the text, directing the attention of his Corinthian converts to certain remarkable events in the Jewish history. He calls to their recollection in the first place the singular marks of favour, with which the people of Israel had been distinguished :—he then reminds them of the ungracious conduct of the Israelites in return, of the consequent displeasure of God, and their destruction in the wilderness :—he thence proceeds to remark in the text, that these things were recorded for the admonition of Christians, who might read in the history of the Jews examples or types of their own condition ; of their spiritual privileges in the blessings conferred upon the Jews, and of their punishment, (provided they were disobedient,) in the disasters, with which that chosen people were afflicted :—lastly he founds upon the whole a caution to those, who might be disposed to pride themselves upon their superior qualifications, not to indulge an ill-founded security, which would probably prove fatal to their ultimate happiness, but to be especially careful and diligent in “ making their calling and election sure.”

Let us direct our thoughts to these particulars in the same order, wherein the Apostle proposes them to our notice ; praying Almighty God for the sake of his well-beloved Son, that the same gracious Spirit, who suggested the admonition to the writer, may give efficacy to it upon the present occasion, and enable it to have its due influence upon our hearts !

I. “ Brethren,” saith the Apostle to the Corinthians, first directing their attention to the marvellous events recorded in the Jewish history : “ Brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea ; and did all eat the same spiritual meat, and did all drink the same spiritual drink : for they drank of that spiritual rock that followed them : and that rock was Christ.” And surely if ever a nation was signally protected by the arm of the Almighty, it was the people, to whom St. Paul alludes in this summary of marvellous events. Rescued from the house of bondage, from the dominion of an arbitrary monarch, by a succession of overpowering miracles, they continued for a series of forty years to experience the unremitted care of a superintending Providence. Did “ the sea lift up his waves ” to obstruct their passage ? The Lord “ caused the

sea to go back, and divided the waters, and made the sea dry land ; so that the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea upon dry land, and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left.”—Did the wilderness present its terrors, to “entangle and to shut them in?” The Lord went before them “by day in a pillar of a cloud to lead them the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light.”—“Hungry and thirsty, did their soul faint within them?” The Lord “prepared them a table also in the wilderness : he brought waters out of the stony rock, and gave them drink thereof, as it had been out of the great deep. He commanded the clouds above, and opened the doors of heaven : he rained down manna also upon them for to eat, and gave them food from heaven.”

II. That a people so signally favoured by the Almighty, should be equally distinguished for their fidelity, might have been reasonably expected : not that they would “turn their backs upon his testimonies,” and fall away from their allegiance, “starting aside like a broken bow.” Yet notwithstanding the especial blessings, by which they were encompassed, “their heart was not whole with him, neither continued they steadfast in his covenant.” Instead of being contented and thankful for the “angels’ food”

which he vouchsafed them, they lusted after “the flesh-pots of Egypt:”—instead of observing the commandment of God to worship the Lord their God, and to serve him alone, they made them a molten calf, and sacrificed thereunto, and offered burnt-offerings and peace-offerings, and worshipped it, and said, “These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt:”—instead of cleansing themselves from all iniquity, as the peculiar people of the Lord, they mingled in the superstitious rites of their idolatrous neighbours, and “committed fornication with the daughters of Moab:”—instead of relying upon the Almighty in their distress, “they tempted God in the wilderness,” and questioned the strength of Omnipotence to save them:—instead of resolutely following the guidance of the Lord, and patiently submitting to his dispensations, they murmured and rebelled against him.

But however variable may be the conduct of men, God is uniform in his dealings towards them. “In Him there is not even a shadow of turning.” He that is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity without hatred, could not be otherwise than displeased with the sinfulness of his people; sinfulness of the darkest complexion, complicated in its nature, and aggravated by the foulest ingratitude. “Therefore was the wrath

of the Lord kindled against his people, insomuch that he abhorred his own inheritance." His displeasure was manifested by his judgments ; various, as were the sins which they avenged, and signal, as the wickedness of the people. The fire, and the pestilence ; the sword, and the fiery serpent ; the earth opening beneath, and the destroying angel from above :—such were the instruments of vengeance, wherewith the Lord God manifested his hatred of sin, and his sore displeasure against the sinner.

III. "Now all these things," as St. Paul observes to the Corinthians, "happened unto the Jews for ensamples ;" or as types of the condition of Christians, "for whose admonition" they are accordingly "written." Let us proceed to consider them, as typical, 1st, of the blessings, conferred upon us ; 2dly, of our punishment, if we be disobedient.

1st. The mercies of Almighty God testified to the people of Israel by the miracles wrought in their behalf, are ensamples or types of the blessings, which he confers upon us.

Speaking of the cloud, which guided the Israelites on their march, and of their miraculous passage through the Red Sea, the Apostle says, that "they were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea :" pointing thereby to that Christian sacrament, by which we are baptized

unto Christ. Rescued from Egyptian bondage by the hand of Moses, they saw the Almighty bearing incontestable evidence to his divine mission by the miracles, that accompanied and protected them on their journey. And they are therefore said to have been “baptized unto Moses,” that is, unto the doctrine taught by Moses; to have taken upon them a profession of belief in him, as the mediator between God and them; and to have vowed obedience to his commandments. The deliverance, with which we are blessed by Christ, is of the same kind; but greater in degree than that, of which Moses was the instrument to the Israelites. It is from a state of bondage, that we are rescued; but bondage so much the more hateful than theirs, inasmuch as the slavery and misery of the soul is more deplorable than that of the body. The people of Israel were delivered by Moses from the tyranny of Pharaoh; we are delivered by Christ from the tyranny of Satan and of sin.

Further: the miracles, by which they were rescued, are types of the instrument, by which God vouchsafes deliverance to us. “They were baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea:” we are baptized unto Christ in “the laver of regeneration,” when by “the renewing of the Holy Ghost, which is shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour, we are justified

by his grace, and made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”

Again: the people of Israel were not only rescued by the hand of Moses from the dangers which persecuted them on their escape from Egypt, but they were also sustained by him with nourishment during their sojourning in the wilderness. When they hungered, and could discover no ordinary food, at the mediation of Moses the Lord sent them meat from heaven: when they thirsted, and could find no water to drink, Moses at the command of the Lord smote the rock, and miraculously supplied them with water. St. Paul calls it “spiritual meat and spiritual drink;” possibly because of their heavenly and supernatural origin: more probably, because of their sacramental character, because they were types of that nourishment, which Christ was to furnish to the soul and spirit of his disciples; for it is with a view to the holy sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, and to the benefits which we receive thereby, that the Apostle here notices the nourishment supernaturally provided for the Israelites. Surprising and worthy of gratitude and honour as that nourishment was, it is surpassed by the food, which Christ furnishes to the faithful member of his Church. In many respects the type and the antitype, the sign and the thing signified, accurately agree together: as, in

the supernatural and divine origin of each ; in their being bestowed of the free grace and goodness of God ; in being distributed to all men alike, without acceptance of persons ; in the support, which they contribute to those who partake in them ; and in their continuance during the whole course of the pilgrimage of them, for whose benefit they were respectively designed : for as the children of Israel did eat manna “ until they came to a land inhabited,” and as the water from “ the rock followed them” through their wanderings in the wilderness, so shall Christians continually eat of “ that bread, which cometh down from heaven,” and drink of that “ water, which shall spring up in them into everlasting life,” until they enter into their rest. But in one respect, the figure is greatly excelled by the thing figured. The meat and drink supplied by the mediation of Moses, was only a preservative from temporal death : but he that believeth in Christ, and partaketh of the food which he gives him, shall never die. “ Your fathers,” said our blessed Lord to the Jews, “ did eat manna, and are dead : he that eateth of this bread, shall live for ever¹.”

But then, 2dly, be it remembered, that as the blessings, which happened to the people of

¹ John vi. 49. 51.

Israel, are ensamples or types of the blessings conferred on us ; so also the judgments, under which they suffered when they provoked God's displeasure by their disobedience, are typical of our punishment also, if we be disobedient like them.

The mercies, which the Israelites experienced, bound them under a most solemn obligation to serve God and to keep his commandments. And the mercies which we Christians experience from "the more glorious ministration" of the Son of God, bind us by an obligation still more solemn, in proportion as our blessings, which are of a spiritual nature, surpass theirs in excellence and value. It is not sufficient for us then, that we become partakers of those sacraments, ordained by Christ, of which the events that we are considering in the Jewish history were figures : it is necessary indeed that we partake in those sacraments, for Christ himself, who ordained them as the ordinary means, declared also that they are generally necessary to salvation. "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." "Verily, verily, I say unto you, except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you." We therefore account the sacraments necessary to salvation : but we can-

not account them effectual to salvation, unless they be accompanied and followed by holiness of life. Greatly as the Jews were favoured by the Lord, and especially signalized by his omnipotence manifested in acts of mercy towards them, they were not suffered to “enter into his rest;” but were excluded from the land of promise, because they provoked God by their wickedness. And as surely as they were overthrown in the wilderness, and not permitted to enter into the promised land, so surely shall the Christian, who estranges himself by sin from the favour of God, and seeks it not again by repentance and faith in the Saviour; so surely shall he fall under the severity of God’s judgment, and be excluded from his heavenly rest. Thou partakest in the sacraments of Christ: thou doest well; the Jews also typically did the same. But “with many of them God was not well pleased; and they were overthrown in the wilderness.” And dost *thou* “lust after evil things, even as they lusted?” Wouldst thou forego thy part in the righteousness of Christ, and in the sanctification of the Holy Spirit; and cling to the chains of thy natural corruption; and give thyself up a willing slave to the worse than Egyptian bondage of sin and Satan?—Or art thou “an idolater, as were some of them?” Dost thou figuratively, as they literally did,

“ bow down and worship a golden image,” or
“ offer thy sons and thy daughters unto devils ?”
Dost thou devote thyself to an exorbitant accumulation of wealth, which the Spirit of truth expressly condemns as “ idolatry¹ ?” Dost thou make “ a god of thy belly² ?” Art thou dedicated to the service of pleasure rather than that of God ?—Or dost thou “ commit fornication, as some of them committed ?” Dost thou pollute thy body by uncleanness, and thus “ defile the temple of God, which temple ye are³ ?” Dost thou “ take the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot⁴ ?”—Or dost thou “ tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted ?” Dost thou “ provoke the most high God, and keep not his testimonies ?” Dost thou believe not in God, and trust not in his salvation, and speak against God in thy affliction, as though he were not mighty to save ?—Or lastly, dost thou “ murmur, as some of them also murmured ?” Dost thou rebel against the commandments of the Lord, or spurn the rod which chasteneth thee ?—If such be thy condition, consider how nearly thy case resembles that of the Jews in ingratitude and disobedience ; and beware lest it also resemble theirs in its punishment ! They

¹ Col. iii. 5.² Phil. iii. 19.³ 1 Cor. iii. 17.⁴ 1 Cor. vi. 15.

perished by the fire, the pestilence, and the sword ; they were “ destroyed of serpents ;” they were “ destroyed of the destroyer.” Remember that “ all these things happened unto them for thy ensample !” Beware, lest the type be verified in thee ! Beware, lest a charge be given to “ the sword of the Lord” against thee ! Beware, lest the wrath of God give thee over to “ the angel of the bottomless pit !” Beware, lest thou be made to “ dwell with everlasting burnings, in the fire that never shall be quenched, where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched !”

IV. Such is the kind of inference to which the Apostle directs our thoughts: seeing that so many who enjoyed great privileges among the Jews, were yet punished greatly for their sins ; seeing that sacraments furnish no privilege either for sin, or exemption from punishment ; “ therefore” (saith he) “ let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.” The inference suggests to me two important remarks, which I shall lay before you, and then briefly conclude the subject.

The first relates to those changes and revolutions, to which human nature is subject. From the Apostle’s words it appears, that this mutability is so great, that no man can absolutely depend on his security ; that “ he that thinketh he standeth, may nevertheless fall.” “ Man’s con-

dition" (observes an esteemed and judicious Commentator upon the passage) "is according to his place and station : this is three-fold. The first place is heaven ; this is fixed and confirmed, a kingdom that cannot be shaken ; the saints there are standing pillars, free from all possibility of falling. The second place is hell, where sinners are bound hand and foot ; and being fallen, are without any possibility of rising. The third place is this earth on which we live, where men both stand and fall ; and the best are subject to falling, being sons of Adam as well as sons of God ; partly flesh, and partly spirit." As long as we are on earth then, let us "take heed lest we fall."

The second remark suggested by the Apostle's inference is this ; that not only he that thinketh he standeth may fall, but that the very opinion of his security is likely to prove the occasion of his falling. Look to the instance of the Jews ; and you will find that presumption, that self-conceit, that self-confidence was the origin and ground-work of their overthrow :—look to the constitution and temper of man ; behold his nature as weak as it is corrupt ; examine his heart, no less "deceitful," than it is wicked ; mark his proneness to "commend himself," when he has no reasonable cause for expecting that the Lord will commend him ; observe his propensity to flatter himself with "visions of

peace, where there is no peace ;” and you will be convinced, that the instance of the Jews is an alarming specimen of the general infirmity and the general danger of mankind.

Conscious that we partake of that infirmity ; and impressed with a lively sense of our exposure to that danger ; let us, my brethren, the more urgently apply to ourselves the admonition, which the disasters of the Israelites were intended to convey : let us profit by the exhortation of the Apostle, and “ take heed lest we fall.” Instead of following their example, and presuming upon our being greatly favoured by the Almighty, let us rather imitate the conduct of St. Paul, who although he was conspicuously and specially a “ chosen vessel” of God, yet counted not himself to have apprehended ; but “ this one thing he did, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, he pressed toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus ¹.” Called by the free grace of God to the privilege of being his peculiar people, from which the Jews “ by transgression fell ;” let us beware how we partake of their transgressions, lest we partake also of their fall. “ Thou wilt say,” argues the same Apostle with the converted Gentiles, and

¹ Phil. iii. 13, 14.

the argument applies to us their successors in the Church of Christ; “Thou wilt say then, The branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in. Well: because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not high-minded, but fear: For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee. Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness; otherwise, thou also shalt be cut off¹.”

May it please Almighty God to grant us his preventing and assisting grace, “that we who cannot do any good thing without him, may by him be enabled to live according to his will!” that being justified by the righteousness of his Son, and guided and strengthened by his Holy Spirit, and “giving diligence to make our calling and election sure,” we may “do those things,” which are commanded us “and never fall; but so an entrance may be ministered unto us abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ²!” To whom, with thee O Father, and thee O Holy Spirit, three Persons in the unity of one God-head, be all honour and glory henceforth and for ever!

¹ Rom. xi. 19—22.

² 2 Pet. i. 10, 11.

SERMON XXIX.

THE USES OF AFFLICTION.

PSALM cxix. 71.

It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn
thy statutes.

“It is good for me that I have been afflicted!”
This is not the language of nature ; this is not the language of the world. Nature impels us, and the world teaches us, to consider affliction as an evil, and to fly and escape from it accordingly : and that for an obvious reason ; because affliction is not adapted to gratify our natural desires and inclinations, or to promote our interest and prosperity in this world. Religion, looking upon us as spiritual beings, as consisting of soul no less than of body, as intended to live in another state as well as in this, forms its estimate of the value of things, by the tendency which they have to promote our spiritual and eternal welfare. It prompts us therefore to look to the other side of the

picture. It does not tell us, that affliction is not an evil ; for that were only to mock and deride us in our sufferings : but it tells us, how it may be converted into a good. “ It is good for me that I have been afflicted,” says the royal Psalmist, who spoke not from a frigid and unfeeling observation on the condition of others, but from a lively experience of his own : “ it is good for me that I have been afflicted,” and why ? because it has been the means of leading me to “ learn thy statutes,” O Lord ! because it has been the means of leading me to a knowledge of thy will ; because it has taught me to “ commune with my own heart,” and to discover the weakness and wickedness of it ; because it has taught me to become acquainted with Thee ; because it has taught me to “ acknowledge my transgressions and to be sorry for my sins ;” because it has been the means, whereby thou, O God, hast “ created in me a clean heart, and renewed a right spirit within me.” “ Before I was afflicted I went astray ; but now have I kept thy word :” and therefore “ it is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes.”

But not only is affliction capable of being converted into good ; religion instructs us, that for that very purpose it is sent upon us. The Gospel accordingly represents Almighty God, in whose hand are “ the issues of life,” and who

dispenses health and sickness at his pleasure, in the light of a tender and affectionate Father, “loving those whom he chasteneth, and scourging every son whom he receiveth ; correcting us, not like the fathers of our flesh, after his own pleasure, but for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness¹.” Let us consider some of the ways, wherein affliction frequently does act, and wherein under proper regulation it always ought to act, and we shall be induced to agree with the royal Psalmist and the holy Apostle ; to acknowledge with the latter the mercy and loving-kindness of God in “correcting” us ; and to confess with the former, that “it is good for us to be afflicted.”

1st. Affliction is good, inasmuch as it affords opportunity for Reflection, without which we can never properly know, what we are or what we want. But necessary as Reflection is, in order to make us acquainted with our spiritual concerns, it is seldom that we have leisure, if we have the inclination, to engage in it. In the hurry of business or of pleasure, good impressions are not easily made upon our hearts ; or, if made, are not easily retained. If we “hear the word, we go forth ; and the care of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it becometh

¹ Heb. xii. 6. 9.

unfruitful." But when affliction removes us from the anxious and fascinating scenes of active life ; when it diminishes our interest in the world by secluding us from its presence ; when it closes our eyes upon the bustle, and our ears upon the tumult, of business and pleasure ; we have then less to withdraw our attention from our spiritual state, and to prevent us from "communing with our own hearts in our chamber, and being still." Meditation is no unimportant branch of a Christian's duty ; and the bed of sickness, or the chamber of affliction, is no inconvenient place, wherein to practise it. Many are the minutes, the hours, the days, the weeks, wherein, as the body is deprived of its vigour, the soul is the only part capable of exertion. "Behold, now is the accepted time ! now is the day of salvation¹ !" Happy is that person, whose thoughts can now be directed into their proper channel ; and who can be made an example of the saying of the Preacher, that "the heart of the wise is in the house of mourning²."

2dly. Affliction is good, as it tends to create in us Humility. Take a man from among the healthy and the strong : exulting in his prowess, proud of his independence, self-confident, and self-sufficient ; he speaks and acts, as if he

¹ 2 Cor. vi. 2.

² Eccl. vii. 4.

“lived and moved and had his being” from no power superior to his own. Follow him to the retreat of affliction ; visit him on the bed of sickness, perhaps of death, and—“how art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, Son of the Morning !” His health is banished and succeeded by disease ; his strength is converted into weakness ; instead of being independent of others, he has, and he feels that he has, “no power in himself to help himself ;” instead of having need of nothing, he is, and he knows that he is, “wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked.” It is well, where this consciousness of weakness is accompanied with that lowliness of mind, to which it ought to lead, and which it should seem, by natural consequence, disposed to produce. It is well, where a sense of the infirmity of our bodies will carry our thoughts farther, and awaken us to an impartial examination, and a conscientious estimate, of the state of our souls.

For 3dly, Affliction is good, as it is the means of leading us to Repentance. He, who contemplates the situation of his body under sickness, and considers how ineffectual are his own exertions, to add one hour to his existence, or to put off for a moment the appointed period, when he shall fall into “the dust of death,” cannot but think with lowliness and self-abasement of a frame, so perishable, frail, and impotent. Has

he then a more flattering, a more cheering, a more encouraging prospect, when he looks to his soul? Is not his soul as much oppressed with sin, as his body is with disease? Is not his soul under the sentence of spiritual, as his body is of natural, death? Is he not as incapable of administering a remedy to the one, as to the other; and, if he trusts to his own powers, must they not equally perish without reprieve? Drawing hastily near and more near to the brink of that gulph, which parts the visible from the invisible world; approaching that dread tribunal, where he expects to hear the sentence of God denounced upon sinners, “depart from me, ye wicked, into everlasting fire, prepared for the Devil and his angels;” conscious that his own sins have comprehended him in the number of the wicked, and brought him under the sentence of merited retribution; how can he refrain from repenting and abjuring, from hating and detesting, the sins, which are now about to plunge him into interminable misery? If his soul be once awakened to meditate seriously upon these things, how can he refrain from condemning his own sinfulness; from confessing his unworthiness; and from seeing, and feeling, that there is no power in himself whereby he can be saved?

4. If Affliction hath profited the sufferer thus far, if it has aroused him from carelessness and

thoughtlessness to a solemn meditation upon his spiritual state ; if it has clothed him with humility, and led him to conviction and repentance of sin ; it will probably be further “ good for him to have been afflicted,” as Affliction may strengthen him in the knowledge of Him, in whom alone he can hope to receive peace and salvation. Driven from its strong holds of pride, of vanity, of self-sufficiency ; convinced of its own impotence ; persuaded that it is lost for ever without a superior Being, “ mighty to save ;” the soul looks around for succour, and finds it in that gracious Redeemer, who “ came into the world to save sinners.” Naturally prone to trust in our own righteousness, we are hereby taught to put our trust in the righteousness of the Son of God. Health and spirits naturally animate us to look to ourselves for aid : it is the property of Affliction to “ cast down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and to bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ¹.”

5. Affliction is farther profitable, as it teaches us Resignation. “ We glory in tribulations also,” saith St. Paul, “ knowing that tribulation worketh patience² ;” and St. James to the same effect encourages the disciples of Christ ; “ My

¹ 2 Cor. x. 5.

² Rom. v. 3.

brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations ; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience¹.” It is true, that in this view the effect of affliction is different, according to the materials, on which it has to work. In him, whose mind is worldly ; who estimates all that befalls him by the influence, which it has upon his temporal state ; who perceives that Affliction impedes his ordinary business, and interferes with his ordinary pleasures ; and who feels, that it not only causes the deprivation of his positive enjoyments, but that it is also the occasion of positive pain ; in such a person the effect of Affliction is to irritate and inflame the natural violence of his temper : it is to render him unquiet, discontented, and impatient. Not so with him, whose “affection is set on the things above.” Accustomed to look upon this world, only as a passage to another, and of course to consider the things, which now surround him, as incomparably trifling when weighed against those to which he is hastening ; habituated to regard the universe and all its concerns as in the hands of God, who disposes them for the benefit of his faithful followers, and who will finally make “all things work together for good to them who love God :” and especially

¹ James i. 2, 3.

instructed to consider Affliction in the light of a merciful dispensation of Providence, whereby he is willing to draw men nearer unto him ; fixing his eye at the same time upon his beloved Redeemer, “the Captain of his salvation,” who was himself made “perfect by sufferings¹ ;” and convinced by the word of truth, that however “grievous chastening may appear for the present, nevertheless it afterwards yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby² :”—he, who thus reflects upon himself and the things about him, labours to subdue the weakness and irritability of the natural man, and to submit with holy resignation to the “correction of the Father of Spirits.” “It is the Lord ;” he exclaims with the venerable Eli ; “let him do what seemeth him good³.” “Shall we receive good at the hand of God,” he demands with the patient Job, “and shall we not receive evil⁴ ?” “For this cause,” he exultingly replies with the holy Paul, “we faint not ; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory⁵.”

6. Affliction is moreover good for us, because

¹ Heb. ii. 10. ² Heb. xii. 11. ³ 1 Sam. iii. 18.

⁴ Job ii. 10. ⁵ 2 Cor. iv. 16, 17.

it improves our Charity. In the vigour of health and strength, amid the glow of brisk animal spirits, in the full tide of pleasure and prosperity, we are apt to be inattentive to the voice and pleadings of distress. In the pride of fancied virtue and integrity, we are apt to think unfavourably of the excellencies, and to be severe in estimating the failings, of others. With a jealous attachment to our own dignity and independence, and a nice sensibility to an injury or an affront, we are apt to be quick in conceiving resentment, and slow in laying it aside. But Affliction corrects and mitigates the judgment; it softens and enlarges the heart. Do we feel ourselves sinking under "a sore burden, too heavy for us to bear;" and can we refuse our sympathy to those who are our partners and fellows in distress? Do we with a contrite sense of our own unworthiness implore the Almighty not to "enter into judgment with us;" and can we presume to be severe in passing judgment upon another? Do we with unfeigned sorrow for our sinfulness, beseech our heavenly Father to "forgive us our trespasses;" and can we, on the very threshold, as it were, of earth, and now drawing nigh to the footstool of the throne of grace, withhold our forgiveness from them "who trespass against us?" Can we refuse to "have mercy on our brother," even as we

trust that “our heavenly Father will have pity on us?”

Thus does Affliction appear to be the Guide to Reflection ; the Teacher of Humility ; the Parent of Repentance ; the Nurse of Faith ; the Strengthen-er of Patience ; and the Promoter of Charity : while of those, upon whom Affliction is thus sanctified to the purifying of the soul and its improvement in Christian graces ; of those, who study to convert it with the blessing of their merciful Father to their spiritual and eternal welfare, that they “may become partakers of his holiness :” of those, who welcome it as the mean, whereby they “may learn the statutes” of the Lord ; of such persons it may be truly affirmed, as the royal Psalmist acknowledged of himself, that “it is good for them to be afflicted.”

Valuable however as Affliction is, it is a season, for which it would be extreme folly and presumption in us to wait ; and so to put off our improvement in Christian virtues until the time of its arrival. It is good for those who are afflicted, that “they learn the statutes of the Lord, and become partakers of his holiness ;” but it is better that we learn those statutes and obey them, that we follow after that holiness and practise it, before the day of affliction arrives. There are many considerations, which should induce us to profit by “the riches of God’s goodness, and

forbearance, and long-suffering," "while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh when we shall say, we have no pleasure in them; or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern¹." When Affliction comes upon us, it may be too late for us to profit by it. It may come, when our heart is "hardened already by the deceitfulness of sin²," and is no more open to repentance. It may fall upon us hastily and unawares; our "fear may come as desolation, and our destruction as a whirlwind³," and may sweep us away from "the land of the living," and out of the place of hope; and then, though we may wish to "call upon the Lord, yet he will not answer;" though we may "seek him early, yet we shall not find him." If it come with a less hasty pace, still it may come with such severity of bodily torment, as may prevent us from duly feeling for the danger of our soul. If it leave our body comparatively at ease, it may seize on our understanding, and drive us to insensibility or distraction. But let it come under its most favourable form, and leave us leisure and opportunity and inclination to open our eyes upon the danger that besets us; still those better resolutions, which

¹ Eccl. xii. 1. 6. ² Heb. iii. 13. ³ Prov. i. 27.

after a long career of vice or thoughtlessness are formed under the immediate pressure of distress and in the prospect of approaching dissolution, appear at the best in a questionable shape, and when put to the trial are commonly found to be delusive. In truth the season of health and vigour is that which is due to the service of God : we are to serve him *then*, when “strong in the Lord and in the power of his might,” we can endure and resist temptation :—then, when we can “eschew evil,” not because we have lost the inclination or the power of sinning, but because he commandeth us :—then, when our love of virtue can be shown not by ineffectual wishes, but by active and strenuous exertions in doing good :—then, when we can offer him the full strength and glory of the harvest, not the wretched “gleaning of the grapes after the vintage is done¹.” As this is the way wherein we ought to serve him ; so this is the only way, wherein we can be assured, that we serve him agreeably to his will. “It is good indeed to be afflicted,” where Affliction leads us to the knowledge and practice of God’s commandments ; and they are happy, who are awakened by suffering from their former dream of carelessness or iniquity, and conducted to a sincere and permanent

¹ Isaiah xxiv. 13.

repentance. But happier still are they ; more abundant is their recompense, and brighter will be their crown of glory ; who having diligently “walked before the Lord in the land of the living,” have been at length “made perfect by suffering :” and thus trusting in the merits, and strengthened by the Spirit, of Christ, have both lived the life, and “died the death, of the righteous.”

SERMON XXX.

THE DEATH OF THE RIGHTEOUS.

NUMBERS xxiii. 10.

Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his.

“OF the righteous ;” that is, of the faithful worshipper of the true God, for such appears to be the signification of the word derived from an attention to the context. Balaam, a Prophet inspired by the Most High, was summoned by Balak, the powerful Prince of the idolatrous Moabites, to denounce vengeance upon Israel, the chosen people of the Almighty. His inclination coincided with that of the Moabitish Prince. But a more potent and an irresistible force overruled his depraved will ; and instead of curses upon the people of God, drew from him the blessings contained in the 23d and 24th chapters of Numbers : and especially in that sublime apostrophe, which occurs at the opening

of the 23d chapter, and which terminates with the words of the text: an apostrophe, undoubtedly designed to impress the idolatrous Balak with a sense of the real misery, notwithstanding the apparent prosperity, of those, who depart from the living God; and of the present peace of mind and ultimate happiness of those, who are faithfully devoted to his service.

That, which Balaam affirms in a special sense concerning the enviable condition of the Israelites, as contrasted with that of their idolatrous neighbours, is generally and at all times true with respect to such as are devoted to the service of God, when compared with the unbelievers and the disobedient. Death, the common and inevitable end of all men, appears with a very different aspect to men of different descriptions. To some it is an object of apprehension and terror; by others it is contemplated with calmness and composure:—some shrink from its approach with disgust; others await it with patience, and welcome it with serenity:—by the wicked it is regarded as an enemy; by the righteous as a friend. I propose in the following discourse to consider the causes of these sensations, so different in different men; and thence to infer the justice of the exclamation in the text, “Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!”

That worldly men fear to die, is a fact of which daily and general experience may convince us : that they should fear to die, needs not excite astonishment.

For, 1st, death deprives them of all those worldly honours, riches, and possessions, in the enjoyment of which the happiness of the carnal man consists. To enjoy these things at his pleasure, he esteems his delight : to be deprived of these, and that too beyond all hope of recovery, is in his estimation to be unhappy. Alas, he thinks within himself, while he enumerates in his thoughts, and surveys with his mind's eye, the various particulars of that felicity, on which his heart has been perpetually dwelling ; must I now depart for ever from all my honours, all my treasure ; from my country ; from my friends ; my riches, my possessions, my worldly pleasures, which are my joy and heart's delight ? Must I go down to the grave, and will " none of these things follow me ?" Of all that I have gathered, and of all in which I have taken delight, must nothing be any longer mine, but a miserable shred to infold my body, and a poor nook of ground for that body to occupy, where " the worms will be spread under me, and the worms shall cover me ?" Alas, alas ; that ever the day should come, when I must bid farewell to all my enjoyments at once, and never hope to

be delighted with one of them again !—To him whose happiness centers in the things of this world, that must needs be no pleasing visitor, which deprives him of his happiness, by depriving him of all which this world can give : and what the wise Son of Sirach saith, is as true as it is affecting ; “ O Death, how bitter is the remembrance of thee to a man that liveth at rest in his possessions ; unto the man that hath nothing to vex him, and that hath prosperity in all things : yea, unto him that is yet able to receive meat ¹ ! ”

But 2dly, even to those, who are not endowed with this world's goods, on whom the sun of fortune doth not shine, but who are beaten with the storms of adversity, poverty, and distress ; even to them the sentence of death, although at a distance it may seem acceptable, yet when it draws near, becomes an object of apprehension and alarm : partly because of that attachment, with which we naturally cling to life, and of that abhorrence, with which we naturally regard the dissolution of soul and body ; partly because of those sicknesses and diseases, of those strong pangs and agonies in the flesh, which commonly forerun, or at least accompany, dissolution.

But there is a third, and a more reasonable, and more powerful motive to the fear of death in

¹ Eccclus. xli. 1.

the worldly man, than the loss of his present enjoyments, and the abhorrence and pain of his dissolution. When that dissolution has been effected, and the soul is now separated from the body, the immortal from the mortal part, whither is it to go? Is the soul also to die? is the whole man to be destroyed and annihilated? or does he not go hence to another life, to another state and condition, wherein the loss of his worldly enjoyments, and the fears and agonies which in this world he suffers, will sink into nothing on a comparison with those excruciating torments, which are prepared for the unbeliever and the sinner? This is that "second death," which the holy Scriptures of truth denounce upon all them, who have their affections fixed on things in this world, and who are removed from this world without repentance and amendment. This is that "second death," which, however the carnal man may have pretended to despise it in the hours of thoughtless enjoyment, he now shudders to contemplate; and recoils from the prospect of it with alarm, and amazement, and horror. This is that "second death," which, as it is, so it ought to be, most feared and dreaded; for it is an everlasting loss, without remedy of the grace and favour of God; and consequently of all joy, pleasure, and happiness for ever:—it is not only the loss of all

positive enjoyment, but it is also the condemnation of the whole man, both body and soul, without redemption, to the everlasting pains of hell : where the ungodly and the uncharitable shall dwell with everlasting burnings, with the worm that dieth not, and the fire that never shall be quenched : and where the recollection of former enjoyments shall serve only as an aggravation to present misery ; and all the kingdoms and glory of this world, could they be possessed, would be gladly exchanged for a drop of “ water to cool the tongue tormented ” in inextinguishable flames.

These are the principal causes, which make death an object of apprehension and terror to the carnal man : he fears to be deprived by it of those things, on which his heart and all his affections are fixed and settled : he fears the awful separation of his soul and body, and the pains which precede or accompany it : he fears those more dreadful pains, which are to be inflicted in another world upon such as have passed through this in a state of bondage to sin and Satan, to worldly business and worldly pleasures ; and “ have not known God, nor obeyed the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ,” nor followed the gracious guidance of the Holy Spirit, who would have “ mortified the works of the flesh and their earthly members, and lifted up their souls to high and heavenly things.”

But such apprehensions and fears as these, congenial as they are to the human heart in its sinful state, are subdued in proportion as righteousness gets possession of it, and engages it in the service of God and of Christ. “To be carnally-minded is death¹ ;” it is the sure road to everlasting misery, the second death of a future world ; and it is also the occasion of those pangs and agonies, which embitter the prospect of death in this :—but “to be spiritually-minded is life and peace ;” whilst it conducts the humble Christian to that future state of happiness, which is emphatically described in holy writ under the appellation of “life,” it fills him here with that “peace of God which passeth all understanding,” with that “righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost,” which enable him to triumph over the apprehensions of the natural man ; and to contemplate death, not as the termination but as the beginning of life ; not as an object of terror, but as a source of comfort ; not as an evil, but as a remedy for all evil ; not as an enemy, but as a friend ; not as a cruel tyrant, exercising his power in the infliction of pangs and torments, but as a kind and merciful guide, leading him from mortality to immortality, from sorrow and pain to joy and pleasure, from the tumult and miseries of this

¹ Rom. viii. 6.

sinful world to “the haven” of quiet and felicity, “where he would be.” To *him* death hath lost his sting; who hath been enabled, through faith in Christ and by the gracious influence of the Holy Spirit of God, to become free from “sin,” which is “the sting of death¹,” and to be “steadfast and unmoveable” in love and obedience unto Christ, “always abounding in the work,” and reposing in the mercy, “of the Lord.”

This is “the righteous” man, the faithful worshipper of the true God, who follows after personal righteousness in obedience to the commandments of God, and as the appointed pathway to heaven; but trusteth at the same time to the imputed righteousness of Christ to secure him an entrance there, and to make atonement for his manifold imperfections, and to reconcile him to Almighty God; this is he, whose “death” we may reasonably wish “to die;” and with respect to whom we ought to study and pray, that “our latter end may be like his!”

A reference to the particulars, which make death an object of apprehension and terror to the worldly man, may lead us to perceive why “the death of the righteous” is desirable; inasmuch as it will appear, that those causes and

¹ 1 Cor. xv. 56.

motives for apprehension do not exist with him, who is devoted to the service of God.

The first cause of anxiety to the worldly man at the prospect of death is, that it will separate him from all those things, which his heart holds dear. Such is not the case with "the righteous," "the spiritually-minded," the servant of God and of Christ. To him indeed this world is not without its enjoyments; it was not meant to be so. Almighty God, when he sent us into a world, abounding with many things, "pleasant to the sense," as well as necessary to our existence, never intended that we should pass through it without being delighted with his gifts. And from those sources of pleasure, which are spread around him, of pure and innocent pleasure, doubtless the religious man derives as much gratification as he who is devoted to the world. But hercin consists the difference; that whilst the worldly man looks on the things, which he beholds about him, as the principal sources of his pleasure, with the religious man they are only secondary objects. "He desireth a better country, that is an heavenly¹:" from the midst of the perishable things, that surround him, he looks forward to "an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away²:" he

¹ Heb. xi. 16.

² 1 Pet. i. 4.

“sets his affection on things above;” there “his treasure is; and there his heart is also.” To one, who is thus minded, death appears, not terrible, as putting an end to his enjoyments; but desirable, as the avenue and introduction to those, which he esteems of the highest price. Is he to quit the honours and dignities of this world? But it is to succeed to “a throne,” and “a kingdom,” and “a crown of glory, which fadeth not away.”—Is he to part from this world’s riches? But it is to inherit that heavenly treasure, “which neither moth nor rust can corrupt, nor can thieves break through and steal it;” that “pearl of great price, more precious than rubies, and richer than gold and fine gold;” that “prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”—Is he to be separated from the pleasures, which this world can give? But it is to be admitted to that “fulness of joy, those pleasures which are at God’s right hand for evermore.”—Is he to be removed from his earthly abode? But it is to be established in “a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.”—Is he to bid an everlasting farewell to his earthly country? But it is to be transplanted to “a better country, that is an heavenly.”—Is he to be separated from the society of his friends? But it is to be again united to them, in a more pure and glori-

fied state, exempt from the failings and imperfections of a corrupt nature, never to part again ; and with them to be associated with “ the spirits of just men made perfect ;” with “ Abraham, the father of the faithful ;” with David, “ the sweet singer of Israel ;” with “ the glorious company of the Apostles ;” with “ the goodly fellowship of the Prophets ;” with “ the noble army of Martyrs ;” with “ the holy Church,” assembled from all the world ; with “ the Angels of God ;” with “ the Holy Ghost, the Comforter ;” with “ Jesus, the Mediator of the new covenant,” the everlasting Son of the everlasting Father ; with God the Father and Lord of all. The weakness of human nature may rebel, and “ the corruptible body may press upon and weigh down the soul :” but he who, with the blessed Apostle St. Paul, has “ fought the good fight of faith,” obeying the will and relying upon the merits of his Redeemer, hath good reason, with the same holy Apostle, to esteem it “ gain to die ;” and judge it “ far better to depart and to be with Christ¹,” than to enjoy all the pleasures, which this deceitful world can bestow.

Secondly, the pangs and agonies, which are to the carnal man so grievous to be borne, and from which the flesh naturally recoils, lose much

¹ Phil. i. 21. 23.

of their severity to “the righteous,” who regards them as just and merciful visitations from the Author and Giver of all good. “It is the Lord ;” (such are the thoughts, with which he endeavours to support himself under his afflictions ;) “It is the Lord ; let him do what seemeth him good. What ? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil ? Truly, it is good for me to be afflicted, that I may learn thy statutes : the trying of my faith worketh patience. Doth not the Lord chasten whom he loveth, and doth he not scourge every son whom he receiveth ? Shall I then despise the chastening of the Lord and faint when I am rebuked of him ? Have we not had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence ? Shall I not much rather be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live ? Although the chastening may for the present seem not to be joyous but grievous, is it not for my profit, that I may be a partaker of his holiness ; and will it not afterwards yield the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them that are exercised thereby ? Did not my blessed Saviour suffer the keenest agonies for me ? Was not He, who is the Captain of my salvation, made perfect through sufferings ? Shall not I strive to follow his example, and patiently bear a little suffering for his sake ? Was not his suffering entirely

unmerited? Is not this which I endure, and much more than this, the due reward, nay greatly less than the merited recompense, of my sins? Yet will it not be the means, through a lively faith in his blood, of raising me to that place, whither he is gone before; and of conducting me to an abode in his Father's house; where all the sufferings of this world shall not be worthy to be compared with the glory, that shall be revealed in me?"—To him, who thus weighs the afflictions, that it pleases God to send him, in the balance of the sanctuary, "surely the bitterness of death is past:" submitting his will to the will of his heavenly Father, whilst like his Redeemer he drinks the cup of suffering; like Him too he is visited by a heavenly Comforter "strengthening him"¹ to drink it.

Need I, in the last place, speak of those assurances, which the holy Scriptures give the righteous, to secure him from the fear of death: by securing him from the fear of those evils, which the worldly man contemplates with horror and dismay? Need I mention, how to them, who steadfastly believe in Christ, and have a holy conversation in this life, and continually cleave unto his mercies, the same Scriptures, which denounce torment to the wicked, promise

¹ Luke xxii. 43.

rest and tranquillity and peace? Such under the old law was the expectation of the holy Patriarchs and of the faithful and righteous men, who departed before the coming of our Saviour. Beautiful to this effect is the language of the author of the Book of Wisdom: "The souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and there shall no torment touch them. In the sight of the unwise they seemed to die: and their departure is taken for misery, and their going from us to be utter destruction: but they are in peace. For though they be punished in the sight of men, yet is their hope full of immortality. And having been a little chastised, they shall be greatly rewarded: for God proved them and found them worthy for himself¹." And again: "Then shall the righteous man stand in great boldness before the face of such as have afflicted him, and made no account of his labours. When they see it, they shall be troubled with terrible fear, and shall be amazed at the strangeness of his salvation, so far beyond all that they looked for. And they repenting and groaning for anguish of spirit, shall say within themselves, This was he whom we had sometimes in derision, and a proverb of reproach. We fools accounted his life madness; and his end to

¹ Wisdom iii. 1—5.

be without honour. How is he numbered among the children of God, and his lot is among the saints¹!” And if these were the hopes of the holy fathers and righteous men before the coming of our Saviour, and before he was glorified ; how much more ought death now to be contemplated by his faithful followers as the gate of refreshment and repose ; since he hath now evidently completed the work of our redemption, and is ascended up into heaven, and is gone to prepare a place for them that love him, according to that plain declaration of his unerring will, that “where he is, even there also shall his servants be²!” Such was the prospect of death, entertained by the holy Simeon, when in delight at beholding the promised Saviour of the world, he “took him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said, Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace according to thy word, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation³.” Such was the vision of the beloved John, when there was vouchsafed to him a sight of those blessed souls, who had “kept the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus : and he heard a voice from heaven saying unto him, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord, from henceforth ; Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from

¹ Wisdom v. 1—5.² John xii. 26.³ Luke ii. 28—30.

their labours : and their works do follow them¹.” And such had been the gracious promise of the Redeemer of the world himself, when announcing the glad tidings of punishment remitted and happiness extended to all those, who come unto God by him, “Verily, verily,” he declared, “I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation ; but is passed from death unto life².” Knowing these things, as revealed in the Scriptures of truth, “the righteous,” when he contemplates death as the passport to a future life, feels not those apprehensions and alarms and terrors, which harrow up the heart of the wicked : nay rather is he “filled by the God of hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost, with all joy and peace in believing³,” that when he “departs hence, he shall be with Christ⁴ ;” and amid the tumult and miseries of this sinful world, derives from the contemplation a delightful foretaste of that uninterrupted “rest,” which is prepared “for the people of God⁵.”

Seeing then, my brethren, that death must come to all ; and that by some he is surveyed with fear, and by others with composure ; that

¹ Rev. xiv. 12, 13.

² John v. 24.

³ Rom. xv. 13.

⁴ Phil. i. 23.

⁵ Heb. iv. 9.

the carnal and worldly man shrinks from him with terror, whilst “the righteous” and spiritually-minded is prepared to welcome him when he comes : what have we to do, but to “pass the time of our sojourning here” in preparing for our departure ; and to endeavour to live the life, that we may die the death of the righteous,” and that “our latter end may be like his?” What have we to do, but to strive all that lieth in us, to love God and to keep his commandments ; to trust in the atonement and satisfaction of his only-begotten Son ; to be guided by the gracious influence of his Holy Spirit ? So may we look forward, during our earthly pilgrimage, with comfort and joy to that solemn hour, which shall transport us from the visible to the invisible world : and so when the time of our departure comes, may we depart in peace, and rest in hope, and rise in glory ; through the merits and mediation of Christ Jesus, our Lord ; to whom in the unity of the Father and the eternal Spirit, be glory, dominion, and power for ever and ever !

SERMON XXXI.

THE GLORY WHICH SHALL BE REVEALED.

ROMANS viii. 18.

I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

SUCH is the point of view, in which the Apostle would direct us to consider the afflictions to which mankind are subject! So light is the estimation, which he attaches to those afflictions, when considered with a reference to that state, which is to come! "I reckon," says he, "that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." "For," as he says in another place, "this our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory¹."

And yet St. Paul, whose words we have here

¹ 2 Cor. iv. 17.

before us, was not a mere speculative observer of human actions and sufferings. He was not one of those slothful characters, who in the peaceable and undisturbed possession of all the enjoyments that fortune can bestow, are sheltered from the storms to which indigence is exposed, and exempted from the necessity of making such exertions, as are required from honest and industrious poverty. He was not one of those, who assume to themselves a superior character from the possession of superior abilities and acquirements ; and who, in their endeavours to attain the heights of human learning, trouble themselves not with attending to the concerns of their fellow creatures ; concerns of which the peaceable and even tenor of their own retired lives leaves them not only careless but ignorant. Nor was he one of those, who with an affectation of insensibility, which, as they pretend, raises them above their fellow creatures, but which in reality is unworthy of a human being, shut their hearts against the influence of every feeling, which Providence has implanted in them.

There was nothing in the character or condition of St. Paul, which would authorize us to place him in the same class with persons of either of these descriptions. He was poor, and under the necessity of having recourse to his own personal, nay his own manual, exertions for

subsistence. He was weak ; and in consequence exposed not only to those sufferings, to which the weak may be regarded as ordinarily liable ; but he was in a more especial manner exposed to the malice of the profligate and unprincipled ; to the indignation of the Heathen philosophers and populace ; and to the fury of his own bigoted countrymen : all of whom in turn scrupled not to wield against him the power they could command, in order to overbear by violence what they could not refute by argument. Learned indeed he was, and versed not only in Jewish but in Heathen literature ; but powerful as was his mind, and extensive as may have been his acquirements, so far were they from being an obstacle to his engaging in the active occupations of life, that they were on the other hand constantly and vigorously employed in such a manner, as to bring upon him unremitted hatred and persecution. So far was he from possessing, or affecting to possess, a stoical insensibility, that his natural feelings appear to have been singularly acute ; and his character is accordingly distinguished by an uncommon liveliness, that forces itself on our attention, whether we consider his conduct or his language : the former of which was animated by the most fervent zeal ; and the latter, both in his speeches and in his epistles, was marked by

that vehemence and impressiveness, which have never been surpassed, and rarely equalled.

We may then consider acute sensibility; unceasing activity; habitual hardship; and severe sufferings and persecutions; as eminently distinguishing the mind and life of St. Paul. These different particulars appear to be summed up by himself in a comprehensive and most forcible passage, in which he compares himself with the other Apostles. “Whereinsoever any is bold, (I speak foolishly,) I am bold also. Are they Hebrews? so am I. Are they Israelites? so am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? so am I. Are they Ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeyings often; in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the Heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things which are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of

all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not? If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things, which concern mine infirmities. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is blessed for evermore, knoweth that I lie not¹.”

From a man, thus constituted, and thus circumstanced, the declaration in my text comes with peculiar efficacy. Had it been delivered by such persons, as those with whom we have been contrasting St. Paul, any one disposed to question its value, might have found a ground for his carelessness with respect to it, in the character or condition of the speaker. In the man of pleasure or the man of retirement he might have attributed it to an ignorance of what human sufferings are; in the Stoic he might have ascribed it to a real or affected insensibility to them. But when he, who from the circumstances of his situation was peculiarly exposed to affliction, and from the constitution of his nature was peculiarly sensible of it, declares, that to him all human sufferings appear light and of no serious moment; we cannot but attach to the declaration the value which it then seems to deserve, and contemplate with admiration that glorious recompense, the very hope of which could effectually blunt the sting of the

¹ 2 Cor. xi. 21—31.

keenest sufferings in a mind of the most lively sensibility.

And in truth although this holy Apostle displays such uncommon fervour, when he speaks of that eternal and glorious reward “which God hath prepared for them that love him ;” and although it may not fall to the lot of many even of the most pious and devout Christians, to be able to speak of and to endure with such perfect indifference “the sufferings of this present time ;” yet strange indeed must be that judgment, which does not think every earthly affliction more than overbalanced by the promised recompense ; and dull indeed must be that heart, which, when it seriously contemplates the reward as held out to us in the Gospel, does not glow with a heavenly exultation ; and feel itself elevated above too fond and anxious a concern for the perishable things of this world.

If however, in order to illustrate the subject, we consider only the state of man upon earth, and confine ourselves for a few moments to a reflection on the sufferings and enjoyments, of which he here partakes ; we may be led to entertain an opinion, that a future state of happiness might be proposed to him, which should consist of enjoyments the same in kind with those that he is blessed with here, but superior to them in degree ; and which should afford him a compensation,

not utterly inadequate to the sufferings, which he might here have endured.

Thus for example ; of our bodily sufferings, those which are the most generally felt of all, and are perhaps as keenly felt as any, are want and labour, sickness and pain. Of these want and labour are the necessary portion of many, very many of the inhabitants of the earth ; and pain and sickness frequently fall to the lot of very many more. Yet we may observe, that these sufferings, keenly as they are felt at times, lose the sharpness of their sting in moments of relaxation ; and are entirely forgotten, or remembered only with pleasure, when succeeded by the opposite enjoyments. He, whose ordinary and never-ending portion is poverty and toil, loses the remembrance of his hardships in the hours of rest and refreshment ; whilst many undertake a life of voluntary poverty, and willingly submit to a temporary deprivation of the comforts and conveniencies of life ; and many again expose themselves willingly to labours, difficulties, and dangers ; persuaded that when they shall have attained the object of their endeavours, and placed themselves in a situation of opulence and rest, they shall no longer feel the sufferings, through which they may have passed in their way. In the same manner, actual pain is no longer remembered, or if remembered is thought

upon with pleasure, by him, who is restored to ease ; and the wretch, who has long tossed on the bed of sickness, so far from retaining an unpleasant recollection of his sufferings, recollects them only to derive from them new subject of joy, amidst the exultation which he feels on the re-establishment of his health and vigour.

And this remark, which is so true of the bodily sufferings to which man is subject, is no less true when applied to the sufferings of the mind ; to those at least, which are not caused by our own folly or wickedness. Indeed the more bitter any affliction is, the more delightful is the opposite blessing, and the higher the enjoyment derived from the change. Thus the anguish of slavery and of the loss of friends, the severest afflictions, which the generous and feeling mind can suffer, would be swallowed up in the delight of him, who should recover the friends, whom he thought that he had lost, or the liberty, of which he had been deprived : as we no longer think of the silent and gloomy winter, that preceded, when our eyes are refreshed with the verdure, and our ears charmed with the melody, of spring.

If now there were to be proposed to us a future state of existence, composed of such enjoyments as those, which have just been noticed ; if we were told, that we should then enjoy all the comforts, which can be derived from a state of opu-

lence and tranquillity ; that no pain should disturb our quiet, no sickness interrupt our health ; that our minds, equally unmolested with our bodies, should be free from all unjust controul ; and that we should be again blessed with the society of our friends, whom we had lost ;—if, I say, such a future state as this were to be promised to us, we might be thereby induced to bear with patience the sufferings of the present. With how much more then, I will not say of patience, but of satisfaction, should we endure our sufferings here ; when we consider them as leading us, through faith in the blood of our Redeemer, to that state of inconceivable glory and happiness, which Christ hath revealed to us in the Gospel !

That immortal and glorious life, offered by the Gospel to the sincere Christian, is not to be a renewal of the humble and transitory life, which we are now leading upon earth ; it is not to be a life of frivolous and unsatisfactory amusement, of barbarous pleasures, or of gross and sensual gratifications ;—much better indeed may we draw a comparison between the helplessness of infancy, and the vigour of manhood ; between sickness and health ; between poverty and nakedness, and the most abundant plenty and the greatest affluence ;—better may we draw a comparison between the gloom of midnight, and the splen-

dour of noon-day ; between the cheerlessness of winter, and the brightness and joy of the summer sun ; than between the life now led by us on earth, and the life which Christ hath purchased for the righteous in the kingdom of his Father.

The life and immortal glory, which Christ hath purchased ; which he hath revealed to us in his Gospel, and hath promised to his faithful followers ; comprehends the greatest and most inestimable blessings, that the tongue of man can express, or the heart of man conceive.

It is, in the figurative language of Scripture, to purchase “ a pearl” of inestimable price¹ ; “ a treasure,” which will never fail us ; which no fraud can diminish, of which no violence can deprive us².

It is to be put in possession of “ a throne”³ and “ a kingdom”⁴ ; a throne, which we can never lose ; and a kingdom, which cannot be shaken.

It is “ to eat of the tree of life”⁵ ; to have given to us an everlasting name ; to have “ written on our foreheads the name” of our God⁶.

It is, in a literal sense, to be translated from a state of dulness and anxiety ; of trouble, afflic-

¹ Matt. xiii. 46.

² Matt. vi. 20.

³ Rev. iii. 21.

⁴ James ii. 5.

⁵ Rev. ii. 7.

⁶ Rev. xiv. 1.

tion, disappointment, vexation ; of real grief, and imaginary pleasures ; to a state of true happiness, and content ; of sincere, rational, and eternal pleasures ; of pleasures, not interrupted by accidents, or sickness ; not embittered by occasional distress ; nor weakened by repetition, nor cloying from satiety ; pleasures, which no external causes shall diminish ; and to which the present infirmities of our nature shall no longer bring alloy.

It is to have our bodies, that slept in the dust, raised again, and again united to our souls ; no longer gross, earthly, corruptible ; but incorruptible, immortal, heavenly ; “fashioned like unto Christ’s glorious body, wherewith he sitteth at the right hand of God ¹.”

It is to have all the powers and faculties of our souls advanced to the highest perfection, of which they are capable ; and to be rendered more fit to understand, to admire, to reverence, and to imitate the operations of the Deity.

It is to “come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem ; and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made

¹ Phil. iii. 21.

perfect, and to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant¹."

It is to dwell in these mansions and in this society ; in a state of eternal rest ; in a perpetual sabbath of unceasing delight ; beholding God face to face ; hymning his praises ; adoring his perfections ; and growing still more like unto him.

But why do I dwell on the circumstances, which are to constitute the happiness of the blest ? Why do I endeavour to detail that "eternal weight of glory, which shall be revealed in them?" Language cannot express ; nor can imagination conceive it. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive, the things, which God hath prepared for them that love him."

And are not these things worthy of being contended for, my brethren ? And is it not well that we should know to whom they will be given, that we may study, and strive, and watch, and pray, that we may be found in the blessed number ? "The glory that shall be revealed in *us*," saith the Apostle : meaning unquestionably such, as should exercise themselves as he did, in running their Christian course : such as "forgetting those things which are behind, and

¹ Heb. xii. 22—24.

reaching forth unto those things which are before, should press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus ¹."

But let us revert to the leading particulars, which we have been considering; and we shall thereby be led to perceive, what are the chief qualifications, which, through the meritorious sacrifice of our Redeemer, will conduct us to "the glory which shall be revealed."

And first, the contrast drawn in the text between the sufferings of the present world, and the glory of heaven, is evidently intended to afford consolation to those, who are afflicted here, by holding up to them the prospect of an ample compensation in the world to come. Is it intended then that all who suffer here shall be admitted to happiness hereafter? Undoubtedly not. Affliction is one of the means, which Almighty God in his wisdom employs, to try the children of men. And to him, who "endureth" affliction, shall be given "the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him." Still it is not a man's sufferings, which will conduct him to heaven; he may suffer here, and he may be miserable hereafter: but it is the patience with which he bears his sufferings, patience founded upon a sure trust and confidence

¹ Phil. iii. 13, 14.

in God, and anxiously striving to tread in the footsteps of a crucified Saviour, which is to bring him unto "the haven where he would be." When "we cry unto the Lord in our trouble," with a perfect faith in him that he will listen to our prayers as far as shall be expedient for us, and will chasten us only for our profit; then we may be assured, that he will ultimately bring us out of our distress. "My son," saith the Apostle, "despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him." To despise the chastening of the Lord, as well as to despise his benefits, is to resist his authority: and "he that resisteth shall receive unto himself damnation." Would you then, that your sufferings should conduct you to glory? Submit to them with calm resignation; with a devout reliance upon the mercy and goodness of God. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God," if you would desire him to "exalt you in due time."

This qualification for our admittance to heavenly glory is suggested by the contrast contained in the text between the sufferings of this world, and the glory of that which is to come. An attention to the leading forms, under which that glory is set before us, will direct us to other qualifications.

And here it may be observed, that when the Scriptures represent the happiness of heaven under the figure of those things, which are esteemed most valuable upon earth ; it is evidently with the intention of teaching us, that this happiness is not to be procured without the most unremitting exertion. The wisdom and the diligence, practised by “ the children of the world ” for the attainment of this world’s goods, must be practised by “ the children of light ” in their pursuit of the treasures of heaven. No man by sitting idle can expect to become wise, or learned, or rich, or great : in the common course of things, even in this world, Almighty God hath ordained, that exertion shall be repaid by success ; that inactivity and indolence shall lead to ruin. And can we suppose, that while we “ sit, and slumber, and fold our hands to sleep,” the treasures of heaven shall be showered down upon us, and we shall be transported to everlasting happiness we know not, nor care not, how ? Why then are we told that the Christian life is “ a race ¹ ” and “ a warfare ² ? ” that we are engaged in a course, wherein we must “ run,” if we would “ obtain ³ ? ” that we must “ fight the good fight of faith,” if we would “ lay hold on eternal life ⁴ ? ” that we must “ endure hardness, as good

¹ Heb. xii. 1.² 1 Tim. i. 18.³ 1 Cor. ix. 4.⁴ 1 Tim. vi. 12.

soldiers of Jesus Christ ¹?" that we must "strive for the mastery," if we would "obtain an incorruptible crown ²?" I attribute no ability to ourselves to help ourselves, but with the grace of the Holy Spirit : I attribute no merit to our exertions in the attainment of everlasting happiness. God forbid ! But always understanding the preventing and assisting grace of God, to enable us to "work out our salvation ³;" and always understanding the merits of Christ, to give efficacy to our endeavours, and recommend them at the throne of mercy ; I contend, that without diligence on his own part no man must expect to be saved. Salvation is the free gift of God ; and so is every earthly blessing which we enjoy : but, as for the attainment of every earthly blessing the means, which God hath appointed, must be diligently followed ; so it is also with the most precious of his gifts, "the pleasures, which are at his right hand ; the fulness of joy," to which the blessed shall be admitted "in his presence." He "giveth us our daily bread ;" but we must "eat it in the sweat of our brows ⁴," and procure it with "the labour of our hands ⁵." He "giveth riches ⁶;" but it is "the diligent hand, which; with his blessing, maketh rich ⁷." He "giveth

¹ 2 Tim. ii. 3.² 1 Cor. ix. 25.³ Phil. ii. 12.⁴ Gen. iii. 19.⁵ Psalm cxxviii. 2.⁶ Eccl. v. 19.⁷ Prov. x. 4. 22.

wisdom¹;" but it is "the man of understanding²," who getteth it, and we must take pains and "apply our hearts to seek it³." So also he giveth us faith and repentance in this world, and will give us everlasting happiness in another : but then he giveth the former, and will give the latter, only unto those, who "hearing the word" of the Gospel "in an honest and good heart, keep it⁴;" and cherish it; and practise the means of grace, which it commandeth; and "add unto their faith, virtue⁵;" "and bring forth fruit with patience⁶." Throughout the gifts of God, throughout the economy of Providence, the analogy holds good. The blessing of God is promised to those, who labour for it; and is withheld from those, who labour not. Indolence in this world attains not to the reward of industry. And we are told on the most unquestionable authority, that many "shall seek to enter" into the mansions of bliss in another world, but shall be rejected because they did not "strive⁷:" and that "Blessed are they that do the commandments of God," (and who can do them without constant activity?) "that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates, into the city of the heavenly Jerusalem⁸."

¹ Eccl. ii. 26.² Prov. x. 23.³ Eccl. vii. 25.⁴ Luke viii. 15.⁵ 2 Pet. i. 5.⁶ Luke viii. 15.⁷ Luke xiii. 24.⁸ Rev. xxii. 14.

Secondly : the change, which the Scriptures teach us, the bodies of the blessed are to undergo, appears designed to warn us of the danger of indulging those sensual appetites, of becoming polluted with those defilements of the flesh, which will as infallibly shut us out of heaven, as God is there. What will be the precise nature of that change, we may not be able at present to understand. But thus far we may, I apprehend, be assured, that our bodies will then be exempted from those unholy passions, which encumber them in this their corruptible state, and occasion them to weigh down the soul. Distinguished from the children of this world, in that “ they will neither marry nor be given in marriage, they, which shall be accounted worthy to attain that world and the resurrection from the dead, shall be equal unto the angels, and be” in a peculiar sense “ the children of God¹.” And as this is the state, to which they are ultimately to be advanced, so it should be our desire and endeavour at present to make a progress towards it, by “ keeping under the body²,” as the holy Apostle did ; by bringing the flesh “ into subjection” to the spirit ; and by “ mortifying our members which are upon the earth, fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concu-

¹ Luke xx. 35, 36.² 1 Cor. ix. 27.

piscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry. For these things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience ¹." "They who do these things shall not inherit the kingdom of God²:" but "shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone³."—Would you that your body should be glorified hereafter? You must "possess it in sanctification and honour⁴" here.—Would you arrive at "the holy city⁵?" You must pass to it by "the way of Holiness⁶."—"Be not deceived: God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he reap. He that soweth to his flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap everlasting life⁷."

Thirdly, by directing our thoughts to a different sort of enjoyments, from those which are the objects of pursuit to worldly men, it appears to be the intention of the Holy Spirit to wean our affections from those earthly things; which, as they are to form no part of the happiness of heaven, so also will render us unfit for heaven, if they occupy any considerable portion of our thoughts and wishes during our mortal pilgrimage. A certain degree of attention to the things on

¹ Col. iii. 5, 6.² Gal. v. 21.³ Rev. xxi. 8.⁴ 1 Thess. iv. 4.⁵ Rev. xxi. 10.⁶ Isaiah xxxv. 8.⁷ Gal. vi. 7, 8.

earth is not only allowable and justifiable, but is indeed necessary and praiseworthy. We cannot do our duty to man without it, in those various relations, which we bear to others in the state of life, to which it hath pleased God to call us. If we cannot do our duty to man, we cannot (it is an inevitable consequence, unequivocally maintained by Scripture) we cannot do our duty to God. Nor is any life perhaps less pleasing to the almighty Giver of all good things, than that of him, who lays up his talent in a napkin, and under an appearance of devoting himself more fully to the duties of religion, refuses to "let his light shine before man," and robs "his heavenly Father" of his due and peculiar "glory."

But there is a manifest and important difference between taking our part in the business of this life, and devoting ourselves to its enjoyments. We, as well as those illustrious worthies, whom St. Paul enumerates in his Epistle to the Hebrews, are "strangers and pilgrims on the earth¹:" life to us, as well as to them, is a journey: and although on this pilgrimage, during this journey, we are not forbidden to seek for those things, which may make our passage easy and comfortable, provided we do not for the sake of such things desert, or relinquish, our duty; still we

¹ Heb. xi. 13.

are to bear constantly in mind that we are travelling to "another country," which ought to be the main object of our desires.

Does the man, who is journeying towards his home through a strange country, suffer his affection to be occupied by the attractions of the land through which he passes? He amuses himself with the different objects around him; he lightens the tediousness of the road by conversing with the companions among whom he is thrown; he reposes during his journey at the inn, which offers him refreshment: but he thinks not of attaching himself to those things; for he knows that the interest, which he can take in them, is but for a short season. From the surrounding objects he hastens to those, which are endeared to him by the circumstances of birth, or residence, and a thousand nameless associations; he bids a cheerful farewell to the companions of his journey, to throw himself into the arms of his family; he quits his inn with alacrity, impatient for the enjoyment of his home. Were he to suffer himself to form an attachment to the things, which offer themselves to him as he passes; were he to "set his affection" upon them; he would thereby become proportionally unfit for the enjoyment of his domestic scenes. "Where his treasure is, there would his heart be also." He would be induced to linger on his road, instead of pushing

forward for the possession of those objects, which await him at the conclusion of his journey : or arrived at his journey's end, instead of giving himself up with entire devotion to the delights of his home, he would be longing after those things which he had been compelled to leave behind him.

Such with respect to the blessings of heaven, is the condition of him, who sets his affection on things in this world ; such, were it possible for him to be admitted into heaven, would his condition be. Instead of regarding this life as his journey, and heaven as his home, he is attached to earth as though it were to be his dwelling-place for ever ; and of heaven he thinks not, but as of some distant and unknown country, in which he hath no interest. And so he loiters and lingers about the pleasures of this world, careless of those heavenly delights, which (if it were possible that he should be admitted to them) it would in his present state of mind be impossible that he should enjoy. For what delight could *he* find in those spiritual pleasures, which are promised in the courts of heaven ; *he*, who has been perpetually devoted to the pleasures of sense ? What enjoyment could *he* have in “ seeing God,” in contemplating and adoring and imitating the infinite perfections of the Deity ; whose thoughts have been constantly occupied

by “mammon?” What delight could a state of holy rest afford to *him*, who finds no gratification but in the tumult of worldly business or of worldly pleasure? How would *he* delight in the society of “the spirits of just men made perfect, of the angels of heaven, of Jesus the Mediator of the new Covenant, of God the Judge of all;” *he*, whose associates here are of the same unholy tempers as himself; whose ministering spirits are angels of darkness rather than of light; who holds no communion with his Redeemer, neither is God in all his thoughts? My brethren, would you be hereafter admitted to these spiritual pleasures, to this spiritual society? Your thoughts, your desires, your affections must in some sort be spiritualized here. You must even now endeavour, with the assistance of the Spirit of grace, to wean your affections from things on earth, and to get a foretaste of things in heaven. You must not only “confess yourselves to be,” but you must act as, “strangers and pilgrims on the earth;” you must even now “desire,” and so desire as to “seek, a better country, that is an heavenly.” Would you hereafter “appear with Christ in glory?” you must now “seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God.” “To be carnally minded is death: but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.”

May it by the blessing of God be the earnest desire and study of each of us, so to bear his part in the sufferings allotted to him here ; so to “ strive to enter in at the strait gate ;” so to “ mortify the deeds of the body ;” so to improve in all wisdom and spiritual understanding ; that being “ strengthened with all might according to his glorious power,” we may in this present life “ walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God :” and that we may “ fail not finally of attaining the glory of that day ;” when “ they that have the harps of God shall sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb ; Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty ; just and true are thy ways, thou King of Saints !”

Now unto “ Him that liveth, and was dead, and behold he is alive for evermore, Amen, and hath the keys of hell and of death ;” even unto “ Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant,” with the Father and the eternal Spirit, one God and Lord Almighty, be blessing and honour and glory and power for ever and ever ! Amen.

SERMON XXXII.

ST. PAUL'S MOTIVES OF EXULTATION AT THE APPROACH OF DEATH.

2 Tim. iv. 6—8.

I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand.

I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith:

Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.

At the time, when St. Paul delivered these impressive words, he was, as they plainly import, in expectation of his departure from this world. It is plain also from the language, in which he speaks of his expected departure, that he did not apprehend a natural death, but one, in which he should be called on to bear witness to the sincerity of his Christian profession by the shedding of his blood. “I am now ready to be offered,

and the time of my departure is at hand." The prospect however of approaching death, and that death a premature and a violent one, was not contemplated by the holy apostle with any feelings of dismay. Looking back upon his Christian career with "a conscience void of offence towards God and towards man¹," and looking forward to a future state with devout confidence in the mercy of Him, "who came into the world to save sinners²," and who had promised that he would never leave nor forsake such as come unto him for life and strive to love and obey him; the apostle resolutely discards those gloomy feelings, which are natural to the heart of man on the prospect of the approaching separation of soul and body; and bursts out in a triumphant and joyful exclamation, "I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing."

That I may apply these words most effectually, with the good blessing of God, to your spiritual edification, and assist you in preparing for that solemn season, to which as we must all shortly

¹ Acts xxiv. 16.

² 1 Tim. i. 15.

come, so it were well that we should be prepared to meet it with a Christian spirit ; I propose to survey those motives of exultation, which the language of St. Paul naturally suggests to our thoughts. His words may accordingly be considered as distributing themselves into two divisions ; a retrospect on the life which he had passed, and a prospect of that which was to come. A consideration of these particulars, together with such observations of a practical nature as may arise from the subject, will suffice to occupy our thoughts on the present occasion.

I. 1. Now from what the apostle says of his past life, it is beyond controversy, that he derived comfort from contemplating it as a life of strenuous and unremitting activity in the service of God. His expressions convey this sentiment in a strong and copious manner ; for they are of themselves highly emphatical, and the repetition of the sentiment under several different forms shows the value which he intended to attach to it. “ I have fought a good fight ; I have finished my course ; I have kept the faith.”

And, first, he describes his life under the figure of a battle, according to what he had said of himself in another place, “ so fight I, not as one that beateth the air¹ ;” and according to the

¹ 1 Cor. ix. 26.

advice, which he had repeatedly impressed upon Timothy, his own son in the faith, "to war a good warfare¹," and to "fight the good fight of faith²."

Secondly, for the same purpose he employs the similitude of a race, at the end of which he speaks of himself as being now arrived. And having on former occasions described his exertions under the same figure during the continuance of his life, "running, not as uncertainly³," "forgetting those things which are behind, reaching forth unto those things which are before, and pressing toward the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus⁴;" so now, in the same animated strain of allusion to the Grecian games, he speaks of himself as having "finished his course."

Thirdly, he describes himself as having "kept the faith," that sacred deposit of the Gospel, which he had preached to others, and which he cherished as the foundation of his own hopes of immortality: that sacred deposit, which, having himself committed it to Timothy, he had repeatedly charged him to keep and to hold fast; and which, having resolutely maintained it while he lived, he was now preparing to set him

¹ 1 Tim. i. 18.

² 1 Tim. vi. 12.

³ 1 Cor. ix. 26.

⁴ Phil. iii. 14.

an example of contending for stedfastly unto the end.

What now are we to understand by these figurative terms, under which St. Paul here speaks of his past life, but that he meant to represent it as a season of active and faithful exertion? Was it a warfare? But what is that, without courage, and alacrity, and watchfulness, and vigour; and who can be a good soldier, unless he "endure hardness?"—Was it a race? But who can run, so as to obtain the prize that he runs for, without temperance and diligence and perseverance; without fixing his eye steadily on the end, and striving resolutely for the attainment of it?—Was it a sacred deposit? But how can such a trust be preserved without fidelity; without a conscientious discharge of duty to him from whom it is received?

Such was unquestionably the notion which the apostle meant to convey of the life, to the close of which he was hastening. And it is equally clear that he derived comfort from such a contemplation of it. Otherwise why should he thus suggest it to the mind of Timothy, now that "the time of his departure was at hand," unless it were to stimulate him to similar exertion, and to encourage him under the difficulties of his situation, by apprising him of the consolation by which they would be alleviated? Not that it is

to be supposed, that St. Paul had any thought himself, or meant to insinuate to his son in the faith, that all the exertions, which he had made in the service of God, were capable of atoning for his sins, and purchasing the divine favour. The humiliating sense, which he entertained of his own natural corruption, and of his actual sins, and the profound gratitude, with which he contemplated the free grace of God in setting forth his Son to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, forbid the suspicion, that St. Paul could have conceived a thought prejudicial to the honour of the Redeemer. He knew too well that he was “bought with a price,” to think that any works of his could be offered in justification of him before God. But being “bought with a price,” even the precious blood of the Son of God, he also knew that it was his part to “glorify God in his body and in his spirit which were God’s¹.” Had he suffered that body to be defiled by sin, had he suffered that spirit to be in thralldom to Satan, he knew, that no inheritance could remain for him among the saints in light, among those whom Christ was to present to God, “holy and unblameable and unreprouable in his sight².” And therefore he so fought the good fight of faith, resisting all his spiritual

¹ 1 Cor. vi. 20.² Col. i. 22.

enemies, the world, the flesh, and the devil, that by the merits, not of himself, but of his Saviour, he might be entitled to lay hold on eternal life : —he “ so ran, that he might obtain¹ : ” —he so kept the faith which was committed to him, that he might not be ashamed ; resolutely withstanding every temptation to depart from his duty, and trusting upon his blessed Redeemer to deliver him out of all : “ I know,” said he, “ whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day² : ” “ for our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world³. ”

2. And this leads me to the second thing to be considered, that, as St. Paul derived comfort from the retrospect of the life, which he had passed, so did he also from the prospect of that which was to come. “ Henceforth,” saith he, “ there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also, that love his appearing.”

And indeed, if we look to the several particulars of that happiness, to which this holy

¹ 1 Cor. ix. 24.

² 2 Tim. i. 12.

³ 2 Cor. i. 12.

Apostle was now hastening, and which he mentions with such apparent delight, we shall perceive that they were no vulgar conceptions, with which he had enabled himself to deprive death of his sting. The prospect, which was now before him of heavenly happiness, was one, of the reality of which he felt assured, as confirmed to him, now, at the termination of the warfare, which he had nobly waged, of the race, which he had diligently run, by the gracious promise of the God of truth. "Henceforth there is laid up for me;" not dependent upon accident, not fluctuating according to the capricious will of a mortal, but allotted and preserved inviolable by the Father of lights for his sons and heirs, even those whom he hath made heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ. And what was it so laid up? It was "a crown," the emblem of the highest felicity, inasmuch as a crown is the ensign of the highest dignity amongst men. But then it was not an earthly crown; not a crown, composed of some gross, perishable, material substance, but "a crown of righteousness; an ornament, fit to adorn the heads of those pure in heart, who, being "washed in the blood of the Lamb, are made worthy to see the Lord¹." "The Lord" himself too, "the righte-

¹ See Rev. vii. 14. Luke xx. 35. Matt. v. 8.

ous Judge," was he, who was to give it: he, who, infinitely righteous himself, covers the iniquity of his faithful followers, and imputes his righteousness unto them. Neither was it to be given in secret; but "at that day," the great day of judgment, in the presence of the assembled creatures; when they, who have confessed Christ before men, shall by him also be "confessed before the angels of God, and before his Father which is in heaven¹." Neither was it to be enjoyed in solitude, as by one, for whom no others felt an interest, and who rejoiced not in the happiness of others: but the blessing of the apostle was to be communicated, in its due proportion, to the other confessors of a crucified Redeemer; and the crown, which was to be given by Christ to him, was to be given "to all them also that should love Christ's appearing." These appear to be the principal points in the anticipated felicity, which excited the desires of St. Paul, when he uttered the animated exclamation before us; and "reckoning the sufferings of this world not worthy to be compared with the glory that was to be revealed in him²," stretched his view beyond the grave and gate of death with a hope full of immortality.

II. From this short and comprehensive, but I

¹ Matt. x. 32. Luke xii. 8.

² Rom. viii. 18.

trust not inaccurate, sketch of the sentiments, which we may suppose to have been present to the mind of St. Paul, when he uttered the triumphant exclamation in the text, let us proceed to make an application of the passage to ourselves. In the season of distress, which most of us are occasionally called upon to experience on the removal of our friends to the other world, we may derive consolation from such an application of the apostle's language, if our previous acquaintance with the deceased shall have given us good reason to be convinced, that they were faithful in performing the duties of their Christian career. In the mean time to those, to whom a bountiful Providence is still pleased to prolong the season of grace, the application may be productive of great spiritual good, if by his blessing it conduce to awaken the thoughtless and the inactive to a sense of their danger, and to stimulate those, who are already sensible of their duty and already engaged in the practice of it, to a life of still more increased exertion.

In many particulars the life of St. Paul was such, as not to afford matter for our imitation. In the general principle however, which is here set forth, it demands our attention : nor is there one amongst us, that professes himself to be a follower of Christ, who can reasonably join in

the language of exultation, wherewith that holy apostle welcomed the approach of death, unless with him also he can declare, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith."

Let us enquire then, is it our endeavour so to act, that we may be enabled by the grace of God, when the time of our departure shall be at hand, to say with devout composure, "I have fought a good fight?" The state in which we are placed is a state of warfare. Our enemies are numerous and powerful. Without us is the world, a wicked and deceitful world, abounding in persecution to terrify us from our duty, and in temptation to seduce us from it. Within us is a heart, too often "deceitful above all things and desperately wicked;" always prone to look with complacency upon its own condition, to magnify its fancied virtues, and to overlook its real vices: whilst a strong and malicious spirit, the devil, continually cooperates with it, and takes advantage of its infirmity to compass his evil designs, even the destruction of our bodies and souls. In opposition to these dangerous foes, who are continually in force against us, has it been, is it still, our endeavour to maintain our ground? Incapable, as we are, of resisting them by our own natural strength, do we strive to be "strong in

the Lord, and in the power of his might¹?" Do we "put on the whole armour of God, that we may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all to stand?" Are our "loins girt about with truth?" have we on "the breastplate of righteousness?" are "our feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace?" "Above all, do we take the shield of faith, and the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God?" And thus prepared for the battle, do we "pray always with all prayer and supplication in the spirit, and watch thereunto with all perseverance;" relying upon the help of the Almighty, as the only power capable of procuring us the victory, and yet "striving for the mastery²," as if we depended on no power but our own?

Again, is it our endeavour to be active in our Christian career, and so to run our course with alacrity, that we may finish it with joy? Life is a warfare; it is also a race: in the former character, courage and resolution appear the qualities most necessary for us to cultivate; in the latter we have need of activity and diligence and perseverance. Do we display in our Christian course those qualities, which we should above all

¹ Eph. vi. 10.

² 1 Cor. ix. 25.

others esteem necessary, if we were competitors for the prize of an earthly contest? Do we "lay aside every weight," which might obstruct, every impediment which might entangle, us in our progress, and the sin which doth so easily beset us; and do we "run with patience the race that is set before us?" Do we "lift up the hands that hang down, and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for our feet," that so they may run the way of God's commandments? Do we study to be "temperate in all things²," remembering how impossible it is, that we should succeed in our attempt, if "our hearts are overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and the cares of this world?" Do we take heed that we "be not wearied nor faint in our minds," remembering that the prize is promised to him that "endureth unto the end³?" And withal do we make it our endeavour, not only to strive, but also to "strive lawfully;" with integrity towards our brethren, and with humility towards God; not taking our own imaginations, our own wishes and inclinations, for the rule of our conduct, but in all things submitting ourselves to the revealed will of God? "If a man also strive for masteries," saith the apostle, "yet is he not crowned,

¹ Heb. xii. 12.² 1 Cor. ix. 25.³ Matt. x. 22.

except he strive lawfully ¹.” In this then, as well as in other particulars, do we make it our business so to proceed in our career, that in the end we may have the grateful reflection that we have “finished our course” according to the will of God?

Furthermore, to these particulars, in which the apostle sets us the example of our duty in the Christian life, do we add that indispensable one of “keeping the faith?” We must “endure hardness, as good soldiers:” we must “run with diligence and patience the race that is set before us;” but above all we must both fight and run from a principle of faith in him, to whom, after all that we can do, we must be indebted for the victory. As good soldiers of Jesus Christ, we must trust to and obey him, who is “the captain of our salvation:” as servants of a crucified Master, we must “look unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.” Is this the conduct which we adopt? Do we heartily embrace the doctrines of that blessed Gospel, which reveals to us in unequivocal terms both the misery of mankind, and “the exceeding great love of Almighty

¹ 2 Tim. ii. 5.

God in sending his Son into the world, that whosoever receiveth and believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life?" Do we rely on the meritorious sacrifice of the well-beloved Son, "God manifest in the flesh," for our justification in the sight of our heavenly Father? Do we rely on the preventing and assisting grace of the eternal Spirit, to enable us, however imperfectly, to obey the Gospel of Christ? Do we trust in his abundant grace to sanctify us and make us "meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light?" "The form of sound words," which we have heard of the inspired ministers of the Lord, it is for us to hold fast, in faith and love: and it is in vain that we shall endeavour to fight or run, unless we continue in the things which we have learned, and so become "wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus¹."

For them, who thus nobly follow the example of the holy apostle, and who are enabled by the grace of God to join in his language of triumph, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith;" for them, who thus give evidence as he did, that they are in the number of those "who love the appearing of the Lord;" for them, as well as for him, "there is

¹ 2 Tim. iii. 15.

laid up a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give them in that day.” And where shall we find so powerful a motive to consolation under the pain, which nature feels at being separated from those who are dear to us ? and where shall we find so encouraging a stimulus to exertion on the part of us who survive ? Weep not then for the dead, neither bemoan them, if together with the hope, which natural affection dictates, reason, in correspondence with the word of God, will warrant you in cherishing the belief, that they are now resting in Christ. If they have resolutely resisted their spiritual enemies, the world, the flesh, and the devil ; if they have earnestly “ pressed toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus ;” if they have steadily “ held fast and earnestly contended for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints ;” if thus they have testified their love for the appearing of their Lord, let the sorrow of the natural man be succeeded by Christian joy, whilst you indulge the delightful reflection, that they are gone hence to “ receive a crown of righteousness prepared for them by their righteous Judge.” At the same time let the consideration of their removal excite you to serious reflection on your own condition, and to zealous and still increasing exertions, that when the hour of your

departure shall arrive, you may not be unprepared to follow. They cannot return to you ; nor indeed, if your hope of their acceptance is well-founded, is it to be desired that they should : but you can go to them. Follow them out of this world you must. Whether you will be admitted into the same state with them in another, and be saluted with the gracious benediction, " Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord ;" or whether you will be dismissed into another state by the terrible sentence of most righteous judgment, and be " cast into outer darkness amid weeping and gnashing of teeth ;" is a question of the nearest concern, the decision of which God hath graciously placed in your own power. May we all diligently profit by his mercy, whilst it is in our power : and never forget, that we " must work the works of him that calleth us, while it is day ; for that the night cometh when no man can work ¹."

Almighty God, who, through thine only begotten Son Jesus Christ, hast overcome death, and opened unto us the gate of everlasting life, we humbly beseech thee, that as, by thy special grace preventing us, thou dost put into our minds

¹ John ix. 4.

good desires, so by thy continued help we may bring the same to good effect, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

S E R M O N XXXIII.

ON SPIRITUAL DELUSION.

GEN. iii. 4.

And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die.

BEHOLD the language, with which man was first tempted to disobey the command of God, and to challenge the severity of his anger ! Behold the promise, whereby the devil first undertook to seduce men, and whereby men first suffered themselves to be seduced, from their allegiance to their Almighty Creator and Benefactor ! Immediately upon his creation, every blessing was conferred on man, who was at the same time made subject to one single commandment, as a test of his obedience to God. The commandment was attended with a denunciation of punishment upon the breach of it. “ Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat ; for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.”

The devil, the prince of those wicked spirits, who had been driven out of heaven for rebellion against God, envied the happiness of man, and plotted to overthrow it. The only method was to remove from him the favour, by prevailing on him to disobey the commandment, of his Maker. In the shape of a serpent, the most subtle of all the beasts of the field, he addressed himself to the woman, from whom he received a confession of the great goodness of God, and a declaration of the enjoined command and the threatened punishment. “We may eat (said she) of the fruit of the trees of the garden ; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.”

And the serpent said unto the woman, “Ye shall not surely die.” What arguments he employed to convince her that the word of God was a lie, the narrative is too compendious to inform us at length : one argument, we know, was addressed to her ambition ; for, “God doth know,” said he, “that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.” Ambition was a passion, with the power of which he was too fatally acquainted, for it was that by which he had so miserably fallen. By this, and probably by other means of persuasion, he convinced or

rather overcame her reason ; and made her believe, that she might break the commandment, and yet not suffer under the vengeance, of God. “ Ye shall not surely die.”

Of what followed you need not be informed. The woman, thus persuaded, and after her the man, ate of the forbidden fruit. Thus “ sin entered into the world, and death by sin ¹.” From that moment Adam and all his descendants became subject to death in this world ; and, what is infinitely worse, to death and endless misery in another. So fatally delusive was the promise of the serpent, “ Ye shall not surely die.”

The same mode of persuasion, which the devil employed to seduce our first parents from their duty, has been often employed, and unhappily with too similar success, upon their posterity. It is thus that men deceive themselves, and suffer Satan to deceive them, with regard to things which concern their everlasting salvation : and “ ye shall not surely die ” is language, with which they are but too apt to encourage themselves amid the commission of actions and during a course of life, against which God hath as plainly denounced a sentence of condemnation, as he did against the breach of his commandment in paradise.

¹ Rom. v. 12.

Let us consider some instances of that delusion, to which men submit, in order to make themselves easy in the practice of a sinful life.

1. The first sort of person that we will notice, as lulled into security by the persuasion, that, whatever may be his sins, he shall not surely die, is the atheist. This is he, of whom the Psalmist speaks, "The foolish body hath said in his heart, There is no God ¹." "Corrupt are they," he adds, "and become abominable in their wickedness." For the most part, those men, who disbelieve in God, are men in other respects also of corrupt principles and of vicious lives. It is for their interest then, that there should be no holy and all-powerful Being, to govern the world; for, if there be such a Being, they must be satisfied, that their wickedness will meet with its punishment, if not in this world, yet certainly in a world to come. They have then only two ways, by which they can find rest to their conscience: either by following the preventing grace of God's Holy Spirit, and by his continual help repenting of and forsaking their wickedness, in order that through a lively faith in Christ, producing reformation and holiness of life, they may by his merits be reconciled to their Almighty Father, who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity: or

¹ Psalm xiv. 1.

by reasoning themselves into a belief that there is no God, and no future state of retribution. The former way is too difficult ; they cannot quit their sinful habits, any more than “the Ethiopian can change his skin, or the leopard his spots ¹.” They take the other road then : they harden themselves in unbelief ; they strive to persuade themselves, and, because men are generally disposed to think what they hope, they do perhaps persuade themselves with the assistance of the evil spirit, who doubtless joins in the delusion, that they shall not surely be punished for their sins ; but that, when they are removed from their existence upon earth, they shall rest in an eternal sleep. Poor, infatuated, wretches ! what will be their feelings of astonishment, and horror, and dismay, when the trumpet shall sound, and summon them from their sleep to appear before the judgment-seat of that God, whom they have denied ; and to commence a new existence, which they will have to spend in everlasting and hopeless torment ! Warned by the apprehension of so deplorable an end, “take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God ².” Be assured, that he is the God of truth, and that the man who despises his command-

¹ Jer. xiii. 23.¹ ² Heb. iii. 12.

ments shall surely die ; however he may labour to “harden himself in unbelief through the deceitfulness of sin ¹.”

2. There is a second description of persons, who believe indeed in God ; but who, if we may judge from their conduct, appear to entertain a very unworthy notion of his perfections. Provided their evil deeds are not blazoned forth in the eye of the world, they feel themselves secure. They contrive to preserve a specious appearance with their neighbours ; and, seeing that their fellow creatures can be imposed upon by a fair outside, they are willing to suppose that the same deceit may serve with their Creator. “Tush, say they, how should God perceive it? is there knowledge in the Most High ².” With this persuasion, not perhaps actually uttered by their lips, but operating with no trifling influence on their hearts, their study is, not to avoid sinning altogether, but to sin in secret. They see, that they escape punishment and go on prosperously here ; they hope, like Adam, to “hide themselves from the Lord,” and to escape from the punishment denounced on sin ; and flatter themselves, that, however death may be merited by their wickedness, they “shall not surely die.” Alas ! little do they consider, that the Lord seeth

¹ Heb. iii. 13.

² Psalm lxxiii. 11.

the hidden things of darkness, and knoweth the very counsels of the heart ; and that for what “ he now seeth in secret,” he will hereafter most assuredly “ reward them openly¹.”

3. As these men are in an error from not entertaining a sufficiently high opinion of God’s perfections, there are others again, who err from magnifying one of his perfections at the expence of the others. It is, I believe, no unusual thing for a man to reason with himself in this manner : “ God is a being of infinite mercy and goodness. Will he then be so severe, as to punish a few light offences with such dreadful torments, as those with which the Bible threatens me ? Will he be so cruel as to take vengeance upon the faults of a few short years by a punishment of eternal duration ? Certainly this can never be consistent with the character of that Being, ‘ whose property is always to have mercy.’ I need not fear then, that the consequences of sin will be so dreadful, as they are represented ; but although I may be threatened with death and eternal misery, I shall not surely die.”

Thus does the sinner console and encourage himself by reflecting upon the mercy and goodness of God. But he would do well to consider, that, if God is a Being of infinite *mercy*, he is also

¹ Matt. vi. 4.

a Being of infinite *justice* ; and that no one of his glorious attributes must be considered independently, or be magnified at the expence of another. “ Mercy indeed goes before his face ; but justice also and judgment are the habitation of his throne ¹.” He has created us free and accountable ; free, to perform our duty, and accountable, if we do not perform it : and he has warned us of the nature and extent of the punishment, by which our neglect to perform it will be followed. His mercy and goodness are enough manifested by his affording us the means of doing our duty, and by his patience and long-suffering in giving us time, and continually inviting us to do it : by his gracious help, in sending us the Holy Spirit to assist our infirmities ; and by his redeeming love, in having sent his Son to make atonement for our sins on earth, and in receiving his mediation and intercession for us in heaven. If we slight these means, if we despise this long-suffering, if we “ tread under foot the Son of God, and do despite unto the Spirit of grace,” we are treasuring up unto ourselves wrath : the mercy of God will have done its part, and must then give way to his justice : and the day of his wrath will be “ the day of revelation of his righteous judgment,” by which he will do no more than what

he has most expressly assured us that he will do; when he shall render to every man according to his deeds ¹." Suffer not yourselves then to be lulled asleep by the hope, that the mercy of God will not permit him to punish the wickedness of men. Justice requires that the wilful and hardened sinner should be punished; and God is a God of justice :—He himself has most plainly told us, that the unrepentant sinner shall surely die; and he is the God of truth.

4. We sometimes meet with men, who are so far deluded as to think that they "shall not surely die," because their sins are not such, as to deserve the wrath and vengeance of God. We follow, say they, the dictates of our nature: and will the Author of nature be so severely displeased at us, and so severely punish us, for acting in obedience to its voice?

Such men forget however, that the nature, the dictates of which they obey, is not pure, as it proceeded from the hands of its Creator; but that it is depraved and corrupted by sin, weakened by infirmities, and overcharged with passions, which reason as well as religion teaches us, that it is our duty to withstand. They forget, that, violent as these passions are, and difficult as they may be to be withstood, it is in our power through the

¹ Rom. ii. 6.

grace of God to withstand them, at least to such an extent as for the merits of Christ's sacrifice to satisfy the divine justice ; that to shew whether we will exert ourselves to withstand them, or not, is the trial, to which we are now exposed ; that God proves us whether we will so exert ourselves or not ; and that, being in our present state capable of standing, but at the same time free to fall, we are assured, if we " resist temptation and endure unto the end," we shall " receive a crown of life ¹;" if we fall, and do not arise, and repent, and amend, we shall suffer the death of eternal misery.

God, who alone knows what allowance ought to be made, and who most undoubtedly will make every due allowance, for the weakness of our nature, will nevertheless not be tender to our wilful wickedness. Those works, which flow from the violence of our passions, are called in Scripture, " the works of the flesh." " Now the works of the flesh," says the holy apostle, " are manifest, which are these ; adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like : of the which," he adds with the most impressive earnestness, " I tell you

¹ James i. 12.

before, as I have also told you in time past, that they, who do such things, shall not inherit the kingdom of God¹." You see then, that, if the apostle of God be true, heaven is shut against those, who wilfully follow the dictates of their nature: we know but of one other place in a future world, which will be open to receive them. Tempt not then the Lord, my brethren, by supposing that these works of the flesh are not of the nature of damnable sins: the devil perhaps may tell you, that, although you do such things, "you shall not surely die;" rather believe ye the warning of God by the mouth of his apostle, and beware how you expose yourselves to feel by woful experience, what and how terrible is the place provided for those, who "shall be shut out of heaven, and shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power."

5. In forming an estimate of the state of their souls and their hopes of everlasting life, there is no mistake, into which men more commonly fall, than that, which I shall next notice. They look round about them;—into the world at large;—or among their neighbours; where they will doubtless at all times find enough, and to spare, of wickedness; and because they see, or think

¹ Gal. v. 19—21.

they see, others who are as sinful as, or perhaps more sinful than, themselves, they immediately feel comfortable in the reflection, that they are safe, and “shall not surely die.” This was the feeling of the Pharisee in the parable; “Lord, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are; extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this Publican.”

And certainly we have reason to be thankful to God on account of every sin, which we are able through the assistance of his grace to avoid. But then we should act a more prudent and a safer part, if we were to fix our attention, not so much upon the sins which other men commit, whilst we are happy enough to avoid them; as upon those, of which we ourselves are guilty. “He that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law¹,” and art therefore answerable to him, by whom the law was enacted. At the day of judgment, it will be no excuse for you to plead, that you were not a sinner in the same respect, in which your neighbour was. His being a drunkard or an adulterer, will not justify you for being a slanderer:—his being a thief or a murderer will not justify you for being hard-hearted and un-

¹ James ii. 11.

charitable. Even if we live a life comparatively innocent, such a life will not justify us in the eyes of God. "I have done no harm," is a bold saying; and argues extreme presumption or ignorance in the person who can employ it. Allowing it to be true, which however it cannot be, for "there is no man that sinneth not¹," still the avoiding of positive sin will not compensate for the omission or neglect of positive duties; and there is no one, it may be presumed, whose conscience, if it be thoroughly probed, will not convict him of having been wanting in the due exercise of self command, and in the practice of active piety to God and active benevolence to man. In fact however, for I wish to repeat so important and necessary a doctrine, it cannot be strictly true; "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us²." After all, the innocence of the purest life can be only comparative; and the question at our great account will not be, what sort of a life did you live, on a comparison with that of your neighbour? but, what sort of a life did you live, on a comparison with the law of God? By that law you ought to live; for by that law in its universal extent, comprehending greater and less important duties, imposing positive as well

¹ 1 Kings viii. 46.

² 1 John i. 8.

as negative obligations, you must expect to be judged.

6. There is another error, akin to this, into which men are prone to fall ; and of which the Pharisee in the parable is again an example. “ I fast,” said he, “ twice in the week ; I give tithes of all that I possess ;” and yet perhaps, like the rest of his brother Pharisees, he “ omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith.”

This is too frequently our case. Naturally inclined to think highly of ourselves, we rather value ourselves on account of the good qualities which we think we possess, than humble ourselves on account of the ill qualities which we really have. Naturally prone to be exalted rather than to be abased, we rather pride ourselves upon the small portion of good we do, than prostrate ourselves, in sorrow and contrition before God, from a lowly sense of the numerous opportunities which we neglect. These things indeed ought we to have done, and not to leave the other undone. Even could we do all those things which are commanded us, (and that no man ever did nor ever will do,) still we must say, “ we are unprofitable servants ; we have done that which it was our duty to do¹.” In the mean time, we

¹ Luke xvii. 10.

ought still less to take to ourselves any merit for doing a part of what is commanded us ; as far as that part goes, it may be well, but that cannot serve to justify us for the parts that we neglect ; and we must look to other merits than our own for our justification, or we shall surely die.

7. The only thing which can save us is faith in Christ, made perfect by obedience to his commandments.

But here again we have cause to be doubly on our guard. It is a fashionable tenet of the present day, that the morality of the Gospel is the essence of the Christian religion : a tenet, false in itself, which however some persons are disposed to carry to an even greater extent, and to contend, that provided a man be what is called a good moral man, it is of little consequence what be his religion, or indeed whether he be of any religion at all.

Not such is the sound scriptural doctrine of our Church. “ They are to be had accursed,” she pronounces in her 18th article, “ who presume to say, that every man shall be saved by the law or sect that he professeth, so that he be diligent to frame his life according to that law and the light of nature. For holy Scripture doth set out unto us only the name of Jesus Christ, whereby men must be saved.” In truth, there cannot be a more grievous error, or one

which runs more counter to the whole plan of salvation through Christ as revealed to us by the Holy Spirit in the Gospel ; nor one, in consequence, which leads to more pernicious or more fatal effects, than the opinion, that a man can be saved by his morality. The commission of Christ to his apostles, “ Go, preach the Gospel to every creature,” was accompanied with the declaration, “ He that believeth, shall be saved ; he that believeth not, shall be damned ¹. ” The first commandment for the regulation of men’s affections and conduct under the Gospel is, “ Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy mind, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength.” Nor is it only the love of God, as our *Creator* and *Preserver*, which is impressed upon us as necessary to salvation, and as the principle of action ; but it is the love of God, as our *Redeemer* ; faith in Christ, who died for our salvation. We are to love God, for “ in this was manifested the love of God towards us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him ². ” We must believe in Christ ; for “ He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life, but he that believeth not the Son, shall not see life ; but the wrath of God abideth on

¹ Mark xvi. 16.² 1 John iv. 9.

him¹." Mere morality therefore, if it has not the love of God and faith in Christ to recommend it and to give it value, is so far from being of the essence of the Gospel, that it is of itself absolutely nothing : in its best condition it is inferior in value to piety, from which it ought to spring ; but never, as surveyed by the light of the Gospel, is it of any price at all, unless it be founded on a lively faith in Christ.

But then on the other hand we must be cautious, that we do not fall into the opposite error, and rest contented with a barren, inactive, and lifeless faith. Some men there are, it is to be feared there are too many, who contend that provided a man have faith, it matters not what may be his life. Misapplying our Saviour's declaration, " He that believeth, shall be saved," and giving a false interpretation to similar passages of Scripture, which are intended, not to deny the necessity of good works, but to " exclude them" (as one of our Homilies expresses it) " from the office of justifying," and to give all the glory of our salvation to the free grace of God and the meritorious sacrifice of Christ ; such persons speak slightly and contemptuously of that holiness, which is the proper fruit and evidence of a saving faith, and *by which* faith is made per-

¹ John iii. 36.

fect, and *without which* no man shall see the Lord. My faith hath saved me, say they, and I “shall not surely die.”

Most strange perversion of evangelical truth ! most strange and dangerous delusion ! As if it were intended for men to continue in sin that grace may abound ; as if a licence were given to wickedness or carelessness by *him*, who died “that he might purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works !” My meaning perhaps will be more clearly conveyed, and it will come with a greater weight of authority, if I express it in the language of our pure and apostolical Church. “No man,” says she in one of her Homilies, “should think that he hath that lively faith which Scripture commandeth, when he liveth not obediently to God’s laws. A man may soon deceive himself, and think in his own fantasy that he by faith knoweth God, loveth him, feareth him, and belongeth to him, when in very deed he doth nothing less. For the trial of all these things is a very godly and Christian life. He that feeleth his heart set to seek God’s honour, and studieth to know the will and commandments of God, and to frame himself thereunto ; and leadeth not his life after the desire of his own flesh, to serve the devil by sin, but setteth his mind to serve God for his own sake, and for his sake also to love all his neighbours, whether

they be friends or adversaries, doing good to every man, as opportunity serveth, and willingly hurting no man : such a man may well rejoyce in God, perceiving by the trade of his life that he unfeignedly hath the right knowledge of God, a lively faith, a stedfast hope, a true and unfeigned love and fear of God. But he that casteth away the yoke of God's commandments from his neck, and giveth himself to live without true repentance, after his own sensual mind and pleasure, not regarding to know God's word, and much less to live according thereunto, such a man clearly deceiveth himself, and seeth not his own heart, if he thinketh that he either knoweth God, loveth him, feareth him, or trusteth in him." And, after some passages from the holy Scriptures, presently she adds to much the same effect, " Thy deeds and works must be an open testimonial of thy faith ; otherwise thy faith, being without good works, is but the devil's faith, the faith of the wicked, a fantasy of faith, and not a true Christian faith. And like as the devils and evil people be nothing the better for their counterfeit faith, but it is unto them the more cause of damnation ; so they that be Christians, and have received knowledge of God and of Christ's merits, and yet of a set purpose do live idly without good works, thinking the name of a naked faith to be either sufficient for them, or else setting their minds upon

vain pleasures of this world, do live in sin without repentance, not uttering the fruits that do belong to such a high profession, upon such presumptuous persons and wilful sinners must needs remain the great vengeance of God and eternal punishment in hell, prepared for the unjust and wicked liver.

These are some of the most common instances, as they occur to me, in which men persuade themselves, or suffer the devil to persuade them, that they “shall not surely die,” when they are upon the brink of destruction; and “see visions of peace, when there is no peace.” They do not believe in God and a future state of rewards and punishments;—or they hope to sin in secret, and to escape from God’s all-seeing eye;—or they trust in his mercy to shelter them from his justice;—or they do not think that their sins deserve the severity of his anger;—or they are willing to think better of themselves than they ought to think, by comparing themselves with their neighbours, or by fixing rather on those parts of their duty which they do than on those which they neglect to do;—or they trust to their observance of the rules of morality, distinguished from, and independent of, Christian faith;—or they trust that believing in Christ, with a dead and inactive faith, will be sufficient to ensure their salvation, notwithstanding they may neglect

the works of piety and charity which Christ hath commanded.

My brethren, if you labour under any of these delusions, (for such they undoubtedly are,) examine yourselves by the light of God's holy word, and pray for his Holy Spirit, to enlighten the eyes of your understanding, that you sleep not in death. You know what followed when the devil deceived our first parents by lulling them into a state of security ; " sin came into the world, and death by sin." He has been practising the same artifice ever since ; and wherever he practises it successfully, the consequence is sin, and the wages of sin death, everlasting death. Warned by these considerations, let us be constantly upon our guard. If we cleave unto Christ by a lively faith, and strive with the grace of his Holy Spirit to hold fast to the commandments of God, we are, through the merits of our blessed Redeemer, secure of eternal life : if we place our trust any where else than on his merits, or if we wilfully break his commandments, and do not thoroughly repent and reform, we shall as surely die ; and having been deluded and enslaved by the devil in this world, shall finally have our portion in that everlasting fire, which is prepared for him and for his angels.

I conclude with one of the collects of our Church : O God, whose blessed Son was mani-

fested, that he might destroy the works of the devil, and make us the sons of God, and heirs of eternal life ; Grant us, we beseech thee, that having this hope we may purify ourselves, even as he is pure ; that when he shall appear again with power and great glory, we may be made like unto him in his eternal and glorious kingdom : to whom with thee, O Father, and thee, O Holy Ghost, ever one God, be the kingdom, the power, and the glory, world without end. Amen.

SERMON XXXIV.

THE FALL OF LOT'S WIFE A MEMORIAL TO
CHRISTIANS.

LUKE xviii. 32.

Remember Lot's wife.

THE words are few, and the sentence short ; scarcely any other in Scripture so short. It abounds however in valuable matter ; and, as on that account it deserves, so on account of its compendiousness it is easy, to be retained in our memories. It was uttered by our Saviour on this occasion. He had in a former verse remarked, that “the days of the Son of man should be as the days of Lot,” in two respects : namely, as to the suddenness of the destruction, that was to come ; and as to the security of the people, that should experience it. For the people of Sodom derided it, and Lot's wife, it should seem, but

Note. The following Sermon is altered and abridged from
Bp. Andrews.

lightly regarded it. Having then alluded to the story of Lot, he draws from it an appropriate and valuable inference, by way of remembrance, in the words of the text, "Remember Lot's wife."

In this very awful and alarming history, there are two especial monuments of God's judgment: the lake of Sodom, and the pillar of salt. The one, the punishment of determined sin; the other, of faint and irresolute virtue. For the people of Sodom are an example of wilful sinners hardened in impenitency; and Lot's wife, of righteous persons, not persevering in righteousness, but relapsing into error. Both to the determined sinner, and to the fainthearted observer of God's commandments, the holy Scriptures respectively address the word of exhortation. Those, who have fallen, the prophet Jeremiah exhorts to "rise again¹;" those, who stand, the apostle St. Paul admonishes to "take heed lest they fall²." To those who are in a state of sin, Moses proposes as an example "the vine of Sodom and the grapes of Gomorrah³," which turn into ashes at the touch. To those, who are in a state of grace, our Saviour Christ recommends Lot's wife as a warning, that when they have once entered upon a profession of the truth or into the course of a virtuous life, they

¹ Jer. viii. 4.

² 1 Cor. x. 12.

³ Deut. xxxii. 32.

turn not again to folly, or fall away from their own steadfastness.

That, which was judged necessary to be done by the Almighty in his holy Scriptures, is still necessary for his ministers to do. They must be alike careful, to lay a solid foundation, and to raise a corresponding superstructure. Whilst with the prophet they admonish men, "If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established¹;" they must no less diligently remind them with the apostle, that if they continue not, "they also shall be cut off²." Whilst they announce the gracious invitation of the Saviour of the world, for men to "come unto him³;" they must no less sedulously repeat the obligation and the necessity of "abiding in him⁴." As long as men shall be irresolute and wavering in their Christian profession, so long will it be requisite to apprize them of the danger of such a disposition, and to call upon them in the words of our Saviour to "remember Lot's wife."

In this example, as in other examples proposed for the regulation of our conduct, there are two points in particular which require our attention : 1st, what was *done* by the person held up to our notice ; 2dly, what was *undergone* by her. The

¹ Isaiah vii. 9.

² Rom. xi. 22.

³ Matt. xi. 28.

⁴ John xv. 4.

narrative of the overthrow of Sodom, in the book of Genesis, sets these particulars distinctly before our view in a single verse: "his wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt¹." We have here a compendious exhibition of her *sin*, and of her *punishment*: of her sin, in looking back upon Sodom; of her punishment, in the transformation which ensued. These are the points which require to be remembered concerning her: and to these therefore I shall severally call your attention.

I. And, 1st, as to her *fault*. The angel had given charge to Lot and his company, on bringing him out of Sodom, "Escape for thy life; stay not in the plain; look not behind thee lest thou perish²." "Escape for thy life;" nevertheless she trifled, as if there had been no danger. "Stay not in the plain;" nevertheless she stayed behind. "Look not behind thee;" yet she would, and did look back, though death were to be the consequence. Thus she did all that she was forbidden; she regarded not any of the angel's words, she "despised the counsel of God against her own soul." This was her sin, the sin of disobedience: consisting withal of several degrees, by which she fell, all of them necessary to be remembered.

¹ Gen. xix. 26.

² Gen. xix. 17.

The first was, that she did not strictly adhere to the command of God by the angel, but trifled with it, and paid it only a partial regard. And this slight regard probably arose from distrust; thinking perhaps that she had left Sodom to no purpose, and that the angel had terrified them by a groundless alarm. The sun rose so clear, and it was so goodly a morning, that she repented of having come away; reckoning her sons-in-law more wise in staying, than Lot and herself in departing. This is the sin of unbelief; the bane both of constancy and of perseverance: of constancy, in the purpose of our mind; and of perseverance, in the tenor of our life.

Hence sprung the second step, that she began to fail; and hung behind; and kept not pace with Lot and the angels. An evil and dangerous sign! For fainting is the next step before forsaking; and following at a distance a preparative to deserting altogether. "He that separateth himself," saith Solomon, "seeketh according to his desire¹;" that is, he seeketh occasion to gratify his wish. He that hath no inclination to follow, will find some cause or other to be left behind.

Had this fainting proceeded from weakness, or

¹ Prov. xviii. 1. marginal reading.

weariness, or want of ability to go on, it might have been pardoned ; but it arose from another cause, which is the third degree. It was, as the narrative informs us, at least to “look back,” and to cast her eye to the place, after which her soul longed. The love of Sodom still possessed her : her feet had quitted it, but her heart remained behind : in look and thought she returned thither, whither in body she might not : and she would probably have returned in body also, if Sodom, like Nineveh, had been still suffered to remain.

Looking back might proceed from different causes ; but in this particular case the application of Christ directs us to the true one. The “stuff in the house¹,” something that she had left behind, affected her, as we collect from his warning in the preceding verse. She grew weary of trouble, and of changing her abode so often : from Ur to Haran ; thence to Canaan ; thence to Egypt ; thence to Canaan again ; then to Sodom ; and now to Zoar ; and that in her old age, when she was most desirous of being at rest. Fearful of the approach of new trouble, and remembering withal her convenient dwelling in Sodom, she even desired to “die by her flesh-pots²,” and to be buried in “the graves of

¹ Luke xvii. 31.

² Exod. xvi. 3.

lust¹:" she wished them, who would, at Zoar, and herself at Sodom again : desiring rather to end her life at ease in that stately city, than to remove, and seek a precarious safety on the desolate mountains. Thus the inquietude and perverseness of her soul was the cause of all that followed ; it was this, which affected her feet and her eyes ; which prevented the former from pressing forward to the mountains, whither she was directed ; and turned back the latter upon the city, whence she had been commanded to flee. " Remember Lot's wife."

This then was the sin of Lot's wife ; a sin, let it be observed, rendered more grievous by two circumstances, worthy of especial regard. One, that she fell, after she had stood long ; the other, that she fell at the very time, when God was offering her the means of safety.

With respect to the former ; if the winter brooks pass away, if the summer fruit putrifieth, if the morning clouds vanish, if the seed which hath no root withereth ; if wavering and light minded professors of religion, whom the Scriptures denote by these similitudes, fall away, and come to nothing, it is matter of little astonishment. No one can expect any other result. But here, in the case before us, is the aggravat-

¹ Numb. xi. 34.

ing circumstance, that this woman should have continued now thirty years, (for that is the time calculated to have passed from Abraham's going out of Ur to the destruction of Sodom,) that she should have persisted all this time, and after all this time should have fallen away. And the rather, if we consider besides, that she not only continued many years, but sustained many things during them, as the companion of Abraham and Lot, in their exile, their travels, and all their affliction. That when she had been in Egypt, and had not been poisoned with the superstitions of Egypt; when she had lived in Sodom, without being defiled with the sins of Sodom; when she had not apostatized for the famine of Canaan, nor been corrupted by the fulness of the city of the plain: that after all this she should lose the fruit of her allegiance, and have done and suffered so many things in vain; this is a circumstance of much weight in forming an estimate of her sin, and well worthy of being laid up in our memory.

Nor is it a less aggravating circumstance, that she wofully perished at the very instant, when God's special favour was held forth to preserve her; that when, more than at any other time, she had means and occasion to stand, then, rather than at any other time, she fell away. Many were the mercies she experienced at

God's hand, by this very title that she was Lot's wife. By it she was incorporated into the family, and made partaker of the blessings, of faithful Abraham. It was a mercy, to be delivered from the errors of Ur : a mercy, to be kept safe in Egypt : a mercy, to be preserved from the sin of Sodom : a mercy, to be delivered from the captivity of the five kings : and this the last and greatest mercy, that means of deliverance were vouchsafed her from the perishing of the five cities of the plain. This, no doubt, greatly aggravates her offence, that being so often remembered by God in trouble, she so coldly remembered him ; and that now, with the offer of grace before her, she "knew not the time of her visitation¹:" but being brought out of Sodom, and warned of the danger that might ensue ; having the angels to go before her, her husband to bear her company, her daughters to attend her, and being now at the entrance of Zoar, the haven of her rest ; she made choice of this very time, place, and presence, in which to perish and to throw away that life which God would have saved ; forsaking the mercy which was vouchsafed her, and perishing in the sin of a wilful falling away from God.

II. Having thus far considered the sin of Lot's

¹ Luke xix. 44.

wife, which we should remember, that we may avoid it; let us turn now to her *punishment*, which we must remember, that we may escape it.

The wages and punishment of this sin of hers, was that, which is the wages of all sin, namely, death. The sound of death is fearful, in whatever way it takes effect; yet it is made more terrible by several circumstances, which meet together in the punishment inflicted upon her.

We desire to die with some previous warning; and sudden death we fear, and pray to be delivered from it. Her death was sudden: back she looked, and never looked forward again. It was her last look.

We desire to have repentance of our sins, ere we be taken away; and death in the very act of sin is most dangerous. Her death was such. She died in the very act of looking back. She died with her face to Sodom.

We would die the common death of mankind, and be visited after the visitation of other men: and a strange unusual death is full of terror. Hers was so. God's own hand was revealed from heaven by a strange and fearful visitation.

Our wish is to die and to be buried, and not remain above ground a spectacle, which nature shrinks from and abhors. As she died, so she remained, a spectacle of God's wrath, and a by-word to posterity, and to as many as passed by.

For until Christ's time, and after, this monument was still extant, and remained undefaced so many hundred years. "I myself," says Josephus, a Jewish writer of good repute, who lived some years after our Saviour; "I myself have seen and beheld it; for it remains to be seen even to this day." Thus have we before us both the fault and the punishment of Lot's wife: let us remember both; and endeavour to shun the fault, that so we may escape the punishment.

For this monument of God's vengeance was left to stand by the Almighty, and it is pointed to by our Saviour as recorded in the pages of sacred history, unquestionably with this intent, that the punishment inflicted upon her might be an alarming admonition, profitable to all future times. Now the great lesson, which it teaches, is the necessity of perseverance in the way of God's commandments: without which, however we may run and strive for the mastery, we can never hope to be crowned. And this perseverance by God's blessing we shall attain, if we can possess our souls with due care; and, unlike the example before us, "forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, press toward the mark for the prize of our high calling¹." And that

¹ Phil. iii. 13, 14.

care, again, will be generated in us, if, unlike the same awful example, we cherish in our minds a lively sense of the admonitions which God vouchsafes us ; and trusting to his counsel rather than to our own, “ we be not high-minded but fear¹. ”

To be more particular however, several valuable considerations result from the story of the fault and punishment of Lot’s wife.

First, we see, that as of our Saviour’s twelve, selected from the rest of his disciples, one miscarried ; and as of Noah’s eight, that were saved from the flood, one also fell away ; so likewise of Lot’s four, a still smaller number, all came not to Zoar, but one of them fell short. So that of twelve, of eight, of four, nay a little after, in the 35th verse, even of two, one is refused ; that we may remember, that there are few, who escape from Sodom in the angels’ company ; and of those, few though they be, nevertheless all are not safe. Who then would not fear, if one may perish in the company of angels ?

Secondly, we see, that the one, who miscarried, had continued long, and suffered many things, and yet, after all this continuance and all these sufferings, fell from her estate, and by the inconstancy of an hour made void the perseverance of

¹ Rom. xi. 20.

so many years ; for, as the prophet says, “ when the righteous turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, all the righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned ; in the trespass that he hath trespassed, and in the sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die ¹. ”

Thirdly, we see, that, as she perishes, so does Sodom at the same time : that the same end comes upon the sinner without repentance, and upon the just without perseverance : the same end upon the abomination of Sodom, and upon the falling away of Lot's wife. They, that go not out of her, perish ; and they, that go out of her, perish too, if they look back. The dead sea is a monument of the one ; the pillar of salt a memorial of the other.

Lastly, we see, that, as one perisheth, and that a person so circumstanced ; so also she perisheth at the gates, even hard by the entrance, of Zoar ; a thing above all others the most alarming, so near her preservation, so close to the term of her deliverance. Remember, that near to the gates of Zoar there stands a salt stone.

These thoughts concerning her condition may lead us to reflect concerning the condition of ourselves, who are no better than she was ; to

¹ Ezek. xviii. 24.

meditate upon it with fear and trembling; and to convince us, that, as we have great need to pray with the prophet, “Thou hast taught me from my youth until now, forsake me not in mine old age, now when I am grey headed¹ ;” so have we great cause to stir up our care of continuing in his goodness, since it is nothing to begin, unless we continue; nor to continue unless we do so unto the end.

Let us remember then, that we do not make light of the angel’s admonition, “escape for thy life:” flattering ourselves with vain hopes of safety, however gently and carelessly we proceed.

Remember, that we do not fail to go whithersoever God would have us, that our soul may live; and that we never buy the ease of our body with the hazard of our soul, or a few days of vanity with the loss of eternity.

Remember, that we do not slacken our pace, nor stand still upon the plain; for so we become fit to be prevented from proceeding to the place of refuge, and to be converted into a monument of an unbelieving soul.

Remember, that we look not back upon the delights of Sodom, which we have once left, and so forget the object of our pursuit. “No one

¹ Psalm lxxi. 17, 18.

that hath put his hand to the plough, and looketh back, is fit for the kingdom of God.”

Especially remember, that we leave not our heart behind us, when we go out of Sodom ; for, if that remain behind, it will obstruct the feet, and turn back the eye ; and neither the one nor the other will do its duty. Remember, that our heart wander not, that our heart long not for forbidden pleasures ; and this care, if it be fervent, will with God's blessing procure for us perseverance.

Again, that we may duly profit, as by her fault, so by her punishment also ; let us remember, that God may send some unusual visitation upon us, as he did upon her ; and take us away suddenly ; and that also in the very act of sin.

Remember the *danger* and the *loss*. It is no less than the perdition of the soul. And, if we lose that, we forfeit all the fruit of our former good course. All that we have done, nay more, all that Christ hath done for us, will have been in vain.

Remember the *folly* ; that “ beginning in the Spirit ” we end in the flesh : that turning our back upon Zoar, we turn our face towards Sodom ; that upon a precious foundation we build a superstructure of wood, hay, stubble.

Remember the *disgrace* ; that, whilst we live,

we shall lose our credit and reputation with those, of whom alone the good opinion is valuable ; and shall be mocked with those words of our Saviour Christ, “ This man began to build, and was not able to finish ¹. ”

Remember the *scandal* ; that, falling ourselves, we shall be a stumbling block to make others fall : a sin, of which our Saviour pronounces, that “ it were better for a man that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he drowned in the depth of the sea. ”

Remember the *infamy* ; that we shall leave our memory remaining on record, together with Lot’s wife, and Judas, and Demas, and other apostates, there to stand and to be pointed at, in the same manner as the pillar of salt.

Remember the *judgment*, that lies upon such persons after their relapse ; that, though they may live, they are benumbed and hardened, like the example before us ; and serve for a caution to others, at the same time that they are altogether unprofitable to themselves.

Remember the *difficulty* of their being again reclaimed to piety and virtue : seven evil spirits entering and taking possession instead of one, so that the last state is worse than the first.

And, lastly, remember, that we shall justify

¹ Luke xiv. 30.

Sodom by so doing ; and her obstinacy in sin will condemn our want of resolution in virtue. For they persisted in the wilfulness of their wickedness, till fire from heaven consumed them : and, they being thus hardened in sin, ought not she (and we much more) to be constant in virtue ? If the drunkard persevere till he hath lost his reason, the unclean person, till he hath ruined his health, and the contentious and litigious, till he hath wasted his fortune ; what a disgrace and ignominy it is, that God's unhappy people should not be as constant in virtue, as these criminals have been, and are in vice !

Each of these by itself, all these put together, will make a full memorial : which if she had remembered, she had been exalted to glory in heaven, not left for a monument of infidelity and disobedience upon earth. It is too late for her : we in due time may yet remember it.

And, when we have remembered these things, let us remember CHRIST too, who gave us the admonition : that he is our Alpha and Omega, the Author and Finisher of our faith ; not only that he commenced the work of our redemption, but that he did not leave it, till he could say, " It is finished ¹." On our part, the highest act of religion is, for the Christian to conform himself

¹ John xix. 30.

to Christ, whose name he bears. And though true love indeed acquires no additional strength from hope, but, even if it hope for nothing, loveth nevertheless ; yet, to quicken our love, which is often faint, and for a full memorial, let us remember *the reward* ; a reward, to be conferred by our blessed Saviour himself, not like the wages of an hireling, or for a period and term of years, but for eternity itself, never to expire, but to last for ever and ever.

But this reward is for those, who shall have endured unto the end, and, having escaped from the habitations of wickedness, have not stayed, till they found refuge in the place appointed by the Lord. *They* only shall escape the wrath to come ; for *them* only the crown is laid up ; not for them, of whom it may be said, in the words of St. Paul to the Galatians, “ ye *did* run well ; ” but for those that can say with the holy apostle himself, “ I have well *finished* my course¹. ” That we may have grace to do so, God grant of his infinite mercy for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord ; to whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be ascribed the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

O Lord, raise up, we pray thee, thy power, and come among us, and with great might suc-

¹ 2 Tim. iv. 7.

cour us : that whereas, through our sins and wickedness, we are sore let and hindered in running the race that is set before us, thy bountiful grace and mercy may speedily help and deliver us, through the satisfaction of thy Son our Lord ; to whom, with thee and the Holy Ghost, be honour and glory, world without end. Amen.



SERMON XXXV.

THE VICTORY OF FAITH EXEMPLIFIED IN THE CHOICE OF MOSES.

HEB. xi. 24—26.

By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter ;

Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season ;

Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt ; for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward.

THE springs and principles, which actuate the worldly and the religious man, are evidently distinct, and widely different from each other. They appeal indeed to the same properties in the human heart ; to our love and our hatred, to our hopes and fears ; but they appeal to them through different mediums. The principles, which operate on the worldly man, speak to him by means of his outward senses ; of his eyes, and his ears : those, which actuate the religious man, act by means of his inward senses, the faculties

of his soul. The worldly man is occupied in the pursuit of objects, which he contemplates visibly before him, and which his eyes can see, and his hands can handle : the religious man seeks after things, which are invisible to the material eye, nor are to be grasped by the corporeal hand. "We walk," saith the apostle, "by faith, not by sight." Yet so powerful is the operation of this faith, founded as it is on the declarations and promises of the God of truth, that it yields not in its effects to the most complete conviction attainable by the outward senses : "reaching forth unto those things, which are before ¹," even as though they were substantially present with it ; and, in the emphatical language of the apostle, "seeing him who is invisible ²."

It is indeed the glory and excellence of faith in the declarations and promises of God, not only that it is not surpassed by the evidence of the things that are seen by the bodily eye, but that it rises above that evidence as to the effects which are produced by each. Not only does the servant of God firmly believe the reality of those things, which the holy Scriptures reveal to him, and resolutely exert himself for the attainment of the blessings, which are promised to those who love God, as much as the natural man

¹ Phil. iii. 13.

² Heb. xi. 27.

believes the excellence, and exerts himself for the attainment, of those things, which his senses represent to him as desirable ; but, when they are brought into competition with each other, faith rises above and triumphs over sight : it regards the blessings revealed by God, as incomparably superior to those surveyed by the natural eye : it renounces the enjoyment of things present, and delights in the hope of those that are to come : it forsakes the things that are seen, and presses forward towards those that are not seen ¹.

In the chapter before us the apostle, meaning to set forth the excellence of faith, which, as he defines it, is “the substance,” the ground or confidence, “of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen,” gives us an interesting catalogue of those illustrious champions in the patriarchal and Jewish church ; who, by virtue of this ruling principle, acquired a victory over the world. In this catalogue of spiritual worthies, among whom we find “Enoch who walked with God, and was translated that he should not see death ;” Noah “the preacher of righteousness ;” and Abraham “the father of the faithful and the friend of God ;” the name of Moses, the great prophet and lawgiver of Israel, the servant of the Lord, “the beloved of God and men,” occupies

¹ Phil. iii. 14.

a distinguished station. Faith in him produced some of its noblest fruits : nor can the strength or the value of the principle in producing such fruits be better illustrated, than in its operation upon one of his natural temper ; one who was a “ very meek man, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth.”

In the following discourse, I propose with the divine grace to consider the victory which Moses gained by faith : 1st, as to the greatest worldly enjoyments, which he rejected : 2dly, as to the affliction, which he “ chose to suffer with the people of God ;” and to the estimation, in which he held this affliction, in that he “ esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt :” and 3dly, as to the hopes, which encouraged and supported him, in that “ he had respect unto the recompense of the reward.” May it please Almighty God for Christ’s sake, so to impress our minds with the contemplation, that it may lead to the improvement of our own hearts and lives, and therein to the glory of his preventing and assisting grace !

I. First then, if we turn our thoughts to those things, which Moses rejected, we shall perceive them to be such, as are most highly valued, and most sedulously pursued, by the world. He “ refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter,” who had adopted him into her

family, and by whose favour he would have been raised, if not to the throne of Egypt, at least to some of the highest dignities in the state. He “chose not to enjoy the pleasures,” which his exalted station would have placed at his command ; he “disesteemed the treasures of Egypt.”

Now there must have been some urgent reason, some strong and substantial argument, to induce him to the practice of this self-denial ; to the rejection of these things, which are generally so much sought and esteemed ; and which, however they may expose their possessors to danger, and however frequently they may be made the occasion of sin, are not sinful in themselves. The reason may perhaps be found, if we attend to the circumstances of the Egyptians and of the Israelites : of the people, from whom he chose to estrange himself ; and of those, to whom he thenceforth became attached.

The Egyptians, amongst whom Moses had been educated, and the daughter of whose king had adopted him, and called him her son, were an idolatrous people : ignorant of the true God, and of his worship ; devoted to the service of false gods, and “changing the glory of the uncorruptible God into images made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things.” It is probable that the apostle alludes to this circumstance in the character and

situation of the Egyptians, rather than to the general deceitfulness of earthly enjoyments, when he says that Moses “chose not to enjoy the pleasures of sin :” pleasures, which perhaps among this idolatrous people, and in the court of an unprincipled monarch, he would not have been permitted to enjoy, without compromising his own religious principles, and exchanging the worship of the Lord God of the Hebrews for the idolatrous services of the Egyptians.

Again ; in the situation of the Israelites we may discover another argument, which would dissuade Moses from being willing to be called any longer the son of Pharaoh’s daughter. Although adopted into the family of the Egyptian monarch, he was a descendant of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob. The Israelites, who were his brethren by nature, were groaning under the most severe and ignominious bondage. To rescue his own countrymen, descendants of the same ancestors, heirs of the same promises, and worshippers of the same God ;—to rescue them from their affliction, was an object worthy of his noblest ambition ; an object, which if it were in his power to accomplish, to neglect it for the sake of his own indulgence would have been a sin. That the deliverance of his countrymen from oppression was in the mind of Moses, we learn from the authority of St. Stephen, commenting

in the Acts of the Apostles upon the narrative of Exodus : “ Seeing one of his brethren of the children of Israel suffer wrong, he defended him, and avenged him that was oppressed, and smote the Egyptian : for he supposed his brethren would have understood, how that God by his hand would deliver them¹.” Thus a love for his brethren, co-operating with the love of God, appears to have prevailed on Moses to abandon his present enjoyments and future prospects in the court and family of Pharaoh, and to withdraw from the temptations of Egypt.

2. From what he refused, let us consider in the second place, what it was that he chose : “ he chose to suffer affliction with the people of God, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt.”

As the honour of being called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, the pleasures of the court, and the treasures of Egypt, did not tempt him to sinful indulgence ; so the afflictions, which threatened him in doing his duty to God and his brethren, did not deter him from the execution of it. Though the Israelites were afflicted, yet Moses knew them to be the children of Abraham, and of promise ; though they appeared to be smitten of the Almighty, he knew them to be

¹ Acts vii. 25.

really the people of God, of whom after the flesh should come the promised Messiah, the glory of Israel, the Saviour of the world. To be reckoned amongst the number of a people like this ; to be the instrument in the hand of God of delivering them from their afflictions, and, in order to that glorious end, to suffer affliction with them ; was an honour greater than could be derived from being treated as a descendant of the most powerful earthly monarch, from being heir to the most flourishing dominions. “ I had rather,” said the holy Psalmist, “ be a door-keeper in the house of God, than to dwell in the tents of ungodliness :” and such was doubtless the sentiment of Moses. The lowest situation, in which it had pleased God to place him ; however accompanied with affliction, and laden with reproach ; would doubtless have appeared to him more desirable than the highest under a heathen monarch, and among a heathen people, accompanied by a surrender or compromise of his principles. Nay the very disgrace, which attached to him by reason of his taking part with the Israelites, he prized as a crown of glory : “ He esteemed the reproach of Christ,” saith the apostle, “ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt.” With that apostle he would have joined in exclaiming, “ God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ !”

3. Thirdly, in these acts of self-denial and mortification, Moses was not without an adequate encouragement. “He had respect unto the recompense of the reward.” The reward, to which he looked forward, was of a very different character from the pleasures which he refused to enjoy ; they were for a season ; that was to be of eternal duration. Although in the law, which he afterwards delivered to the people of Israel in the wilderness, the promises of God were for the most part, professedly at least, of a temporal kind, it was not only to this kind of promises that the Israelites in general had respect ; still less was it from a contemplation of these, that their great lawgiver derived his encouragement and support. He knew that the God, whom he served, was “the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob ;” and that the patriarchs, whose God he was, although they were now gathered to their people, would hereafter rise again and appear before him, and be admitted to a heavenly and eternal reward ; for that “he is not the God of the dead, but of the living¹.” He had respect therefore to a reward different from those earthly dignities, which he renounced in Egypt, and from those transitory blessings, to which he was leading the people of Israel ; even

¹ Mark xii. 27.

to a reward “in a better country, that is an heavenly,” where that God, whom, though invisible, he saw by faith, had “prepared for him a city.”

From thus considering the conduct of Moses, let us call our thoughts home to ourselves. However beautiful may be the example which he exhibits of faith, exercising itself in self-denial and patience, and animated by a glorious hope of immortality, the example is of no value, it is indeed lost upon us, if it is not made conducive to our improvement.

First, then, let us demand of our hearts, generally and with a view to our leading spring of action, is it of a religious or a worldly character ; is it derived from heaven or from earth : is it set in motion by what we see, or by what we believe : in one word, do we “walk by faith,” or “by sight?” Let us take a particular case ; the case, or at least not unlike the case, of our first parents in the garden of Eden. The fruits of the garden, the good things of the world, are set before us ; to some by divine bounty we have free access ; on others a prohibition is laid, “touch not, taste not, handle not : if thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die.” This is the appeal, which God makes to our inward senses : he tells us what to do, and he warns us of the consequence of disobedience : “the wages of sin is death.” If we

believe his word, and act accordingly ; if faith is the regulator of our actions ; we refuse to eat of it, and we live. But then the tempter interferes ; he places visibly before us the forbidden fruit in the most alluring colours : “ we *see*, that the tree is good for food, and that it is pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise,” wise, not unto salvation, but in things perchance wherein ignorance were better than wisdom ; wise in worldly wickedness ; wise in our own conceits. What now is our condition ? Which proves to be the stronger principle ? Relying on “ the evidence of the things not seen,” do we look forward to the realising of the promise, and keep the beginning of our confidence firm unto the end ? or, eager rather to profit by the present opportunity of enjoying that which is seen, do we stretch forth our hand unto the forbidden tree, and take of the fruit thereof, and eat ? If, with the word of God commanding us one thing, we follow the dictates of our appetites, and do another ; we may call ourselves believers, but essentially we are not such : we may say that we have faith, but essentially we have none. When we act according to what our *senses* prompt, not to what our *faith* dictates ; when we walk by sight, instead of walking by the faith which we profess ; we are, to all intents and purposes, practical infidels.

But quitting the general statement, let us come more immediately to the particular case of Moses.

1st. "By faith Moses refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; and chose not to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; and disesteemed the treasures of Egypt:" in other words he renounced honours, pleasures, and riches; and why? because they interfered with his duty to God and to his brethren.

I wish particularly to insist upon the cause, for which Moses renounced these things. It has been the error of recent times for men of a levelling and turbulent spirit, to decry the distinctions of rank and fortune, as being not dangerous, but sinful in themselves; and to speak disrespectfully and contemptuously of those who possess them, as if on that account alone they were sinners: a spirit, I am persuaded, not more at variance with good order in society, than with the revealed will contained in the word of God. Abraham, distinguished by the honourable character of the father of the faithful, was distinguished also for his worldly riches: and some of the most favoured servants of the Most High are enumerated amongst the wealthiest and most powerful kings of Israel and Judah. Or, to look no farther than to the land of Egypt, Joseph had presided with integrity and honour, and had been in favour both with God and man amongst

the people and in the court, from which Moses now chose to estrange himself. Or, to look no farther than to the individual himself, Moses, who had renounced all dignity in Egypt, nevertheless complied with the divine command, and subsequently became the leader, the lawgiver, and the prince, of the people of Israel. It was not therefore from worldly distinction, merely as such, from which Moses withdrew ; but it was from worldly distinction, as it interfered with the calls of his duty.

The question then suggested to our thoughts, as applicable to our own conditions, is not, are we distinguished by worldly advantages from our fellows ; but, do we suffer those distinctions to lead us into sin ? Do we suffer them to draw us aside from the full devotion of ourselves to God ? Do we let them close our hearts to the sufferings, the wants, the welfare of our brethren ? Moses would not compromise *his religious principles* : he would not relinquish the God of the Hebrews ; he would not become an idolater. “ Covetousness is idolatry : ” drunkenness and gluttony are idolatry : a surrender of ourselves to any domineering appetite, to any lust of the flesh, is idolatry : Do we conscientiously abstain from every thing like a denial of Him, whom we profess to serve ; the God of the Hebrews, the God of the Christians, the Lord God of earth

and heaven? Moses would not forsake *his suffering brethren*: He had pity on them in their distress: He desired, and endeavoured, to deliver them. Do we partake of his brotherly love towards those, who are oppressed and heavy laden? Do we suffer not our own enjoyments to interfere with a study to promote the welfare and comfort of our brethren?

2dly. By faith, Moses “chose to suffer affliction with the people of God, and esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt.” In the opinion of Moses all earthly honours sunk into nothing, when compared with that of being one of the people of God. Is our judgment like this? To be children, not of the blood, but of the faith of Abraham; to be numbered among the true Israelites, the faithful Israel of God; to be the people of the Father of heaven; to be the disciples of an incarnate God, a crucified Saviour; to be the temples of the Holy Spirit of God; is this our boast, and our glory, and our crown of rejoicing? Is it our choice, if the will of God be so, to suffer afflictions with his people, and to be persecuted for righteousness’ sake, rather than to be conformed to the world, and enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season? Is it our desire, if such be the will of God, to endure reproach for the sake of Christ; to “be hated of all men for his name’s

sake ;” like him to “ endure the cross and despise the shame ;” like him to wear a crown of thorns, and esteem it our crown of glory, richer than all the kingdoms of the world, and brighter than all the glory of them ?

Lastly, By faith, “ Moses had respect unto the recompense of the reward.” And surely that was no weak or wavering faith, which, rising above this cloudy speck, could dart its sight into the “ third heaven¹,” and “ see him who is invisible,” and survey the beauties of the heavenly Canaan, even as his mortal eye from the top of Pisgah beheld the land of promise, the type of his inheritance, of that country of the people of God, to which he was straightway to be conveyed. Is this the recompense of the reward, to which we look forward with the eye of faith, with which we animate our hopes, with which we invigorate our exertions ? Is it, that we may enjoy a little and a little more of the transitory pleasures, which this world can give ; is it, that we may add a trifle more to our heap of earthly riches ; is it, that we may rise another round in the scale of honour ; is this the sort of recompense, which we seek for our exertions ; or rather is it, that we may “ come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the

¹ 2 Cor. xii. 2.

heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant?" Behold a reward, worthy of the most earnest desire and longing, of the most indefatigable and unremitting exertions, of a reasonable and immortal soul! Behold a reward, worthy of the glory of the Giver; of the blood of Christ to purchase, of the love of the Father to bestow, of the communion of the Holy Spirit to ensure to the humble and faithful believer!

Blessed are they, who, like Moses the servant of the Lord, have respect unto this recompense of reward! Looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of their faith, they lay aside every weight and the sin which doth so easily beset them, and run with patience the race that is set before them: till at the word of the Lord, which bids them be gathered to their people, they lie down and depart in peace; trusting in the blood of the atonement, that when Christ who is their life shall appear, then shall they also appear with him in glory.

Thither may God Almighty bring us all, of his abundant mercy, and for the sake of his only-begotten Son, Christ Jesus our Lord: to whom

with the Father and the Holy Ghost, three persons in one Godhead, be blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, now, henceforth, and for ever. Amen.

O God, who hast prepared for them that love thee such good things as pass man's understanding; pour into our hearts such love towards thee, that we, loving thee above all things, may obtain thy promises, which exceed all that we can desire, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

SERMON XXXVI.

THE BLOOD OF CHRIST OFFERED THROUGH THE
SPIRIT THE AVENUE TO THE SERVICE OF GOD.

HEB. ix. 13, 14.

For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh ;

How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God ?

It was the object of the author of this epistle, to convince the Hebrew converts of the insufficiency of those religious ordinances, which were appointed under the Mosaic law ; and of their consequent abolition by the all-sufficient dispensation of Christ. In furtherance of this general object, we hear him severally maintaining the superlative excellence of Christ's *person*, not only above that of Moses, but above the very angels also, by the ministration of whom the Jewish law was delivered ; setting forth the dignity and per-

fect efficacy of Christ's *priesthood*, and the insufficiency of that of the Levites ; and contrasting the mere figurative nature and utter insufficiency of the legal *ceremonies* and *sacrifices*, with the perfect sufficiency of Christ's death for the redemption and pardon of mankind.

It is in this last division of his subject, that the text occurs ; wherein he contends, that, if the outward and typical performances of sacrificing, washings, sprinklings, and the like, were allowed to be sufficient to cleanse the Jews from legal defilements, and to procure them re-admission to the service of the tabernacle and the temple ; “ much more would the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge their conscience from dead works, to serve the living God.”

I have made these remarks in order to show the general course of the apostle's argument, and thereby the relative purport of the two verses in the text ; in which you perceive, that the inference in favour of Christ's sacrifice is drawn from what the persons addressed admitted in the sacrifices under the law. Setting aside however this comparison for the present, and withdrawing our attention from the former of the two verses, I propose to confine it to the latter ; which I shall treat as an affirmative proposition, declaring, that “ the blood of Christ, who through the

eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, *does* purge our conscience from dead works, to serve the living God."

Now this proposition contains in a small compass much of the most essential doctrines of our faith. It represents, in the first place, the Holy Three engaged in our redemption ; God the Son, a Lamb without spot, offering himself by the shedding of his blood to save us ; God the Holy Ghost sanctifying and supporting him in his human nature ; and God the Father accepting the propitiation : and, secondly, it represents mankind, purified by the offering from the pollution of their sins, and admitted to the service of the living God.

I. 1. First then, it represents to us Christ, the Lamb of God, a Lamb without spot, offering himself through the shedding of his blood to save us.

That a spotless offering was necessary to expiate our sins, both reason and revelation concur in proving. As the creatures and servants of God, we owe a perfect obedience to his laws ; and, could we pay that obedience to the full, we should be doing no more than our duty : if then our obedience be in any degree defective, it is in that degree a departure from our duty ; nor can the performance of what we do, for it is no more than we are bound to do, make any satisfac-

tion for what we do not. Can a debtor pretend, that the payment of a part of his debt is a reasonable compensation to his creditor, instead of the payment of the whole? Is a servant justified by the observance of a partial fidelity to his master, for not practising towards him that entire devotion of his service, to which the master is duly entitled? Is the frowardness of a son towards his father excused by occasional acts of duty, by occasional testimonies of honour? How then by an imperfect performance of our obligations can we reasonably pretend to satisfy our heavenly Creditor, Master, and Father, who most justly claims from us the total surrender of our bodies and of our souls? This consideration precludes the possibility of a sinful creature making atonement for his own sins, and much more for those of others. And it remains, that, if atonement be made at all, it must be made by a being totally exempt from sin.

This, which in few words expresses the reason of the thing, is agreeable to the language of Scripture. In the Jewish passover, which is universally known and allowed to have been a type of Christ, the Christian passover, the offering was to be “a lamb without blemish¹.” And according to the type is the antitype; according

¹ Exod. xii. 5.

to the similitude on earth was the original preordained in heaven. "Christ was without spot," saith the apostle in my text : Christ, that "Lamb of God," as the Baptist termed him, "which taketh away the sin of the world¹:" Christ, as St. Peter expressly tells us, "a lamb without blemish and without spot²." Although he took our nature upon him, in this respect alone he did not resemble us ; he was invested with our earthly tabernacle, but his Divine purity contracted no defilement from communicating with the earth : he was exposed like us to temptation, but he was not, like us, infected with sin. "Which of you convinceth me of sin³," was an appeal, which he, and he alone of all the sons of man, could safely make to his enemies : and it was the sentence of Pilate and Herod themselves, of the temporising heathen, and the jealous ambitious Jew, that "they found no fault in him at all⁴."

Christ the propitiatory offering being thus pure, it is next to be observed, that the instrument, by which the expiation was to be effected, was his blood. The wages of Adam's sin was death to himself and to his posterity : the ransom to be paid by Christ was his blood, in token of the penalty of death, from which he came to release

¹ John i. 29.

² 1 Pet. i. 19.

³ John viii. 46.

⁴ John xviii. 38.

them. So constantly and distinctly was this requisite kept in view in the figurative sacrifices of the Jewish law, that, as we read in Leviticus, “it is the blood which maketh an atonement for the soul¹ :” and, as the apostle comments upon the law in the chapter before us, “almost all things are by the law purged with blood ; and without shedding of blood there is no remission² .” And the same apostle, not here only, but elsewhere, shews the value to be attached specifically to the blood of Christ, where he describes him as “having made peace through the blood of his cross³ ;” and as “being set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood⁴ .” And St. John with the same particularity describes him, as having “washed us from our sins in his blood⁵ :” and St. Peter, to whom I before referred as noticing the verifying of the former type in Jesus, points out and specifies the instrument, by saying that we are “redeemed with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot⁶ .” It was the blood of the paschal lamb, which, being sprinkled upon the lintel and the door-posts of the Israelites, turned away the destroying angel from coming in unto their houses to smite them : it is the blood of the true

¹ Lev. xvii. 11.² Heb. ix. 22.³ Col. i. 20.⁴ Rom. iii. 25.⁵ Rev. i. 5.⁶ 1 Pet. i. 19.

Lamb of God, which now extends its protection to those who put their trust in it ; and, whilst an unbelieving world, typified by the impenitent Egyptians, lieth in wickedness exposed to the divine vengeance, causes the destroyer to pass over the dwellings of the Israel of God.

Further let it be observed, that the sacrifice, thus made by Christ, was not imposed upon him by any other consideration than that of his own unbounded love ; that it was an act of his own free and unmerited grace. He offered himself, says the apostle in the text : “ he gave himself for us,” as he expresseth it in another place¹ : “ he gave himself for our sins² ;” “ he hath loved us and hath given himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour³.” All which passages, and many more, if they were necessary, prove, that his offering was not compulsory in any sense, but voluntary altogether ; that it was the offering of one, “ who had power to lay down his life, and power to take it again⁴ :” that it was not of debt, but of grace ; not of our merits, but of his free will ; not deserved at all on our part, but perfectly gratuitous on his : in a word, that it was the offering of one, endued with divine perfections, and graciously exercising

¹ Gal. ii. 20.

² Gal. i. 4.

³ Eph. v. 2.

⁴ John x. 18.

those perfections in the behalf and for the salvation of his sinful and unworthy creatures.

2. From God the Son, thus offering himself, let us now turn to God the Holy Ghost, through whom the offering was made. "He offered himself," says the apostle in my text, "through the Eternal Spirit:" by whom he was sanctified and supported in his human nature during the performance of his most arduous enterprise; the Spirit having been "given unto him without measure¹," and bearing constant testimony to him that he came from God. It was by the operation of the Eternal Spirit, that he was conceived in the womb, and born of a virgin mother². It was by the Eternal Spirit, that he was animated at his baptism, when the heavens were opened, and the Holy Ghost in a bodily shape descended like a dove, and lighted upon him³. It was the Eternal Spirit, who "led him up into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil⁴," and who supported and strengthened him in the conflict. It was the Eternal Spirit, who inspired him with wisdom "to speak the words of God." It was by the Eternal Spirit, that he was anointed "to preach the Gospel to the poor," and to perform the other works of his

¹ John iii. 34.

² Matt. i. 18. 20.

³ Matt. iii. 16.

⁴ Matt. iv. 1.

ministry¹. It was by the Eternal Spirit, that he offered himself upon the cross ; and it was by the same Spirit, that he was declared to be the Son of God with power, by the resurrection from the dead².

3. And, as the offering was thus made through the Eternal Spirit, so was it accepted by God the Father. The apostle only tells us in the text, that "Christ offered himself unto God:" but how could that precious offering, conceived, undertaken, prosecuted, and accomplished, according to the Father's own everlasting purpose and grace, fail of being accepted with him? "In burnt-offerings and sacrifices for sin, indeed, he had no pleasure;" but, when Christ came into the world to bear the sins of many, and offered himself in the body which the Father had prepared, and for the purpose of doing his will; how could he fail of being accepted? In the abundant fulness of God's love for men, even the sacrifice of his only-begotten Son was unto him a sacrifice of a sweet-smelling savour: nor was that a slender testimony to the greatness of his good will towards men, and to his acceptance of the proffered atonement, when, in recompense of that death upon the cross, to which Christ in the likeness of men had been obedient, he glori-

¹ Luke iv. 18.

² Rom. i. 4.

fied the very nature in which he had suffered ; and, as the man Christ Jesus, “highly exalted him, and gave him a name which is above every name ; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth ; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father¹.”

II. We have thus seen the Holy Three cooperating with that unity of will, which is inherent in their unity of substance, for the offering of the Man Jesus : and we turn now to consider, secondly, the effect of that offering in “purging our conscience from dead works, to serve the living God.”

The benefits here specified are twofold ; the former, the removal of an evil, the latter, the bestowing of a good.

1. And first, the sacrifice of Christ is said to be effectual to “purge our conscience from dead works.”

Now, by the fall of Adam our nature became essentially corrupt ; and, in consequence of this corruption, whilst we continued under the law, whether it were the law of nature, or that prescribed for the people of Israel, we were all sinners, had all fallen short of the glory of God, and were all exposed to death the wages of

¹ Phil. ii. 9—11.

sin, due to those sinful works, which through the original corruption of our nature we were all prone to commit. This appears to be what the apostle intended by “dead works;” works sinful, and consequently deserving death; and to “purge our conscience from these works,” is to make atonement for them, to wash us from their guilt, to relieve us from their misery, and to absolve us from their punishment.

2. This is the former benefit; and it is introductory and preparatory to the latter, that of our “serving the living God.” For God, being a holy God, can enter into covenant with none, nor admit them into his service, whilst they lie under the guilt of unpardoned sin, and so have not found grace in his sight. “Noah found grace in the sight of God,” and with him God established his covenant¹. Abraham believed in God, and this was “counted unto him for righteousness;” and then the Lord made a covenant with him with sacrifice². So again, the Jews offered burnt-offerings, and sacrificed peace-offerings to the Lord, and the blood was sprinkled upon all the people, and then he entered into covenant with them³. And in the same manner, forgiveness and remission of sins being extended to us Christians by virtue of the meritorious sacrifice of Christ, we are, on our believing in

¹ Gen. vi. 8. 18.

² Gen. xv. 6.

³ Exod. xxiv. 8.

that atonement, admitted into covenant with God, and for the merits, not of ourselves, but of Christ, thought worthy of being taken into his service. Hence the apostle saith, "Let us draw near to God in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil," that is a condemning, "conscience¹."

And so we gain an insight into the especial blessings, which Christ shed his blood to purchase for us. By his blood he purged our conscience from dead works, and made atonement and propitiation for our sins, for he gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works. By his blood he washed us from the *guilt* of our sins, for "he his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, and was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him²." By his blood he relieved us from the *misery* of sin, for he died to bring us into a state of righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost³. By his blood he absolved us from the *punishment* of sin ; for "he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities ; the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed⁴." By his blood he be-

¹ Heb. x. 22.

² 1 Pet. ii. 24.

³ Rom. xiv. 17.

⁴ Isa. liii. 5.

came the mediator of a new covenant, into which he thus procured us admission, a covenant, both better than that of works which God made with the Jews, and established upon better promises ¹. By his blood he hath restored us to our allegiance to God ; and hath “suffered for us in the flesh, that we should no longer live in the flesh, to the lusts of men, but to the glory of God ².” By his blood he hath opened to us the gates of heaven, that they, who faithfully serve the living God in his church here, may be admitted to serve him in his sanctuary hereafter : for, “for this cause,” says the apostle, pointing in the following sentence to the great and ultimate object of Christ’s sacrifice, “he is the mediator of the new covenant, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions, that were under the first covenant, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance ³.”

Such are among the principal blessings, which Christ shed his blood to purchase ; blessings, which he has purchased for all mankind, and which he offers alike freely to all ; but which will eventually be enjoyed by none but those, who embrace him by faith in his blood, and follow him in holiness of living. Be it our care, my brethren, so to “hold fast the profession of our faith,” and so to follow his precepts and his

¹ Heb. viii. 6.

² 1 Peter iv. 1, 2.

³ Heb. ix. 15.

example, that we may not fall short of his salvation. And if thus we do, while we regard the blood of Christ as the price of our redemption, let us at the same time convert it into a source of humility and confidence : of humility on our own parts ; and of confidence in him. For how can we be otherwise than *humble*, when we reflect upon the necessity of Christ's blood being shed ; a necessity occasioned by that corruption of our nature and by those manifold sins, which we all commit, and which, but for the offering of our blessed Saviour on the cross, must have led to the everlasting punishment of us miserable sinners ? And how can we fail of perceiving, that to trust to our own works or deservings, instead of relying upon the merits of Christ, is to trust in the staff of a broken reed ; on which if a man lean, it will go into his hand and pierce it ? But then, on the contrary, how can we avoid feeling and cherishing the most delightful *confidence*, when we reflect upon the voluntary shedding of the blood of Christ, who offered himself without spot for our redemption ? And how can we fail of placing our sure trust and confidence in him ; believing that God the Father, who spared not his own Son, but gave him for us, will with him also freely give us all things necessary for our salvation ; that God the Son, who hath redeemed us by his cross, will never

leave nor forsake his faithful followers, but raise them up and justify them at the last day; and that God the Holy Ghost, through whom Christ offered himself to the Father, will continue to sanctify those whom he hath regenerated at their baptism, and constantly strengthen them with his assisting grace, provided they grieve him not by their sins, nor resist him through the hardness of their hearts, until they be finally admitted into glory?

Thither may the Lord God Almighty bring us all through the blood of Christ; to whom with the Father and the Eternal Spirit, the ever blessed and undivided Trinity, be ascribed the kingdom, the power, and the glory, in all churches of the saints, now and for ever !

SERMON XXXVII.

THE PSALMS PROPHETICAL OF CHRIST'S DEATH AND RESURRECTION.

LUKE xxiv. 44.

And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the law of Moses, and in the Prophets, and in the Psalms concerning me.

THESE are the words of our blessed Lord, who herein repeats after his resurrection, what he had already signified before his crucifixion, that, in order to give him a claim to the character of the Messiah, it was necessary, that in his person should be fulfilled every thing foretold of the Messiah in the Jewish scriptures. These scriptures he designates by the names of the three parts, into which they were then divided; the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms; the last division comprising the three books of Solomon, as well as the collection of hymns, which we now exclusively understand by the name of Psalms.

It is not my present intention to make any remarks on this declaration of our Saviour, as it relates to the fulfilment of predictions contained in the two first divisions of the Old Testament, the Law or the five books of Moses, and the Prophets:—nor do I mean to consider the word “Psalms” in that more comprehensive sense, to which I have just alluded. My object is to remark solely on that collection of hymns, which is introduced into our Common Prayer-books for the daily service of the church: selecting from amongst them such as most indubitably point at the death and resurrection of Christ; and out of this number confining myself principally to those, which are set apart by our church as the proper Psalms for Good-Friday, and Easter-day.

And I will here briefly observe, as a preliminary step, that those persons, if indeed any such there be, are under a great mistake, who consider the Psalms in no other light than as descriptive of the situation and feelings of David, and the other holy men, who composed them. They make us acquainted indeed with many particulars relating to those holy men; with the weighty afflictions, by which their authors were oppressed, with the hopes, that solaced them in their sufferings, and with the thanksgivings, that hallowed their deliverance. Yet often too are they to be

considered as having a prospective view ; as prefiguring a person more holy than the authors of them ; a person, of whom David may be regarded as the emblem, but whose sorrows were greater than those of David, and whose exaltation was more glorious than his.

Thus, for example, does the Psalmist, in the 88th Psalm, complain in general terms that “ his lovers and his friends had deserted him ” in the hour of his trouble ? and does he, in the 41st, most pathetically lament, that in particular even “ his own familiar friend whom he trusted, who did also eat of his bread, had laid great wait for him ? ”—We turn to the History of our Saviour, and find the general complaint authorized by the conduct of his disciples, who, in the time of his affliction, “ all forsook him and fled ; ” and the particular expostulation warranted by the conduct of Judas, who rewarded the kindness of his master by counselling with his bitterest enemies to betray him into their hands ; and who left the table, where he had partaken of the holy communion, then instituted by his Lord, to betray him with a kiss, the mark of familiarity and love.

Does David, in the 69th Psalm, bewail, in a literal sense, his own afflictions, where he says, “ I am full of heaviness : I looked for some to have pity on me, but there was no man, neither found I any to comfort me ? ”—and does he, in the

following verse, figuratively lament, that his enemies infused every bitter and acrimonious ingredient into his cup of sorrow, where he says, “they gave me gall to eat, and when I was thirsty they gave me vinegar to drink?” We look to the narratives of the evangelists, and find both the literal and figurative complaint of the Psalmist realized in the conduct of the enemies of Christ, who not only conspired to aggravate his sorrows by every circumstance of insult and cruelty, but who literally “gave him to drink vinegar mingled with gall.”

David might say, solely in his own person, as in the 22d Psalm, “my God, my God, look upon me, why hast thou forsaken me?”—But precisely the same words, and with a fuller and more appropriate meaning, were used by our Saviour on the cross.—David might exclaim in the spirit of bitterness, “All they that see me laugh me to scorn ; they shoot out their lips and shake their heads, saying, He trusted in God that he would deliver him : let him deliver him if he will have him.” But this was precisely the conduct, and these were the very words of the chief priests and scribes at the crucifixion.

There are other parts of the same Psalm, of which I hardly know, how they are to be applied, either literally or figuratively, to David ; but of which, whoever reads them, must instantly see

the literal application to Christ. I hardly know, how we are to understand of David, that "his hands and his feet were pierced," that "his garment was parted," or that "lots were cast upon his vesture:"—but when we read in the Gospel that Jesus Christ was crucified by his hands and feet being nailed to a cross;—and that "the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took his garments and made four parts, to every soldier a part:" that the coat was without seam, woven from the top throughout; and that "they said therefore among themselves, let us not rend it, but cast lots whose it shall be;"—when we read this narrative of facts in the Gospel, we hardly stand in need of the comment of the evangelist, that this was a fulfilment of the scripture.

The 40th Psalm must also be regarded as exclusively applicable to Christ, where it is said, "Sacrifice and meat offering thou wouldest not, but mine ears hast thou opened. Burnt-offerings and sacrifice for sin hast thou not required. Then said I, Lo, I come. In the volume of the book it is written of me, that I should fulfil thy will, O my God: I am content to do it, yea thy law is within my heart." Here the declaration of the inefficacy of the sacrifices enjoined under the law, to take away sin, and of the divine disapprobation of such sacrifices, when relied on for

that purpose ;—the profession of the readiness of the speaker to do, and to suffer in his own person, the will of God ;—the reference, which he makes to predictions concerning himself in the more ancient scriptures, that is, in the books of Moses, those being the only parts of the Old Testament, which contain predictions of the Messiah, before the time of David ;—the delight which he describes himself as feeling in performing the will of God, and in accomplishing the law ;—these considerations, drawn from the words that I have just cited from this Psalm, concur not only to prevent its being applied to David, but to fix it on Jesus Christ, who (as the apostle argues with the Hebrews, in his explication of this same passage) in obedience to the divine will and for our sanctification “ was offered once for all.”

As many of the Psalms, those for example to which I have thus alluded, are to be read with a view to the *sufferings* of our Saviour, and are to be regarded as prophetical of those sufferings, so again are others to be read with a view to his subsequent *exaltation*.

Such is the case, in a greater or less degree, with all those which our Church selects for the service of Easter-day. Thus the 111th, and the 113th, beautiful indeed and admirable as they are, if considered merely as hymns of triumph and thanksgiving applicable to the circumstances

of the Israelites, acquire an appropriate beauty, when taken in this figurative sense. That "redemption," spoken of in the former of these Psalms, as sent by God unto his people, and that "covenant," which he is said to have established with them, have an evident propriety, when understood solely in their literal sense, as pointing to the "redemption" of the people of Israel from Egypt, and to the "covenant" of the law:—by us however they are to be understood in a more enlarged sense, as pointing to the "redemption" of the whole world, Gentile as well as Jew, from the bondage of sin, and to the more gracious "covenant" of the Gospel. The verse, which concludes the latter of these two Psalms, the 113th, had an immediate reference to the sacred history of the Old Testament, where we meet with several instances of barren women, miraculously made to bear children. We however are taught to apply the words to that marvellous exertion of divine power, whereby the Gentile church, after so many years of barrenness, became, in her old age, a fruitful parent of children, and the mother of us all:—an application, which we are warranted in making by St. Paul, who gives the same signification to the following animated address of Isaiah, "Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear; break forth into singing, and cry aloud, thou that didst not travail

with child : for more are the children of the desolate, than the children of the married wife, saith the Lord. Fear not," continues the prophet, still addressing himself to the church, "for thou shalt not be ashamed ; neither be thou confounded, for thou shalt not be put to shame : for thou shalt forget the shame of thy youth, and shalt not remember the reproach of thy widowhood any more. For thy Maker is thine husband ; the Lord of hosts is his name : and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel, the God of the whole earth shall he be called."

Thus again the 114th Psalm celebrates the deliverance of Israel from Egypt, and the miracles wrought for the service of that particular people :—but we are to consider it, as prefiguring the redemption of our nature from sin and death, and the wonders of mercy and love wrought for us by Jesus Christ, the very Paschal lamb ; whose sacrifice, like that of the original passover in Egypt, was preparatory to our deliverance.

Thus also, with respect to the 2d Psalm, which David is supposed to have written, as a kind of inauguration hymn, when he was at length seated upon the throne of Israel, and was now about to carry his victorious arms amongst the neighbouring heathen nations. But the strong and elevated language of the Psalm itself, as well as the testimony of St. Peter and of St. Paul, authorizes us

Christians to understand it of a monarch more glorious than David. In the passion of our Saviour the former part of it was exemplified, as St. Peter remarks when he says, "For of a truth, O Lord, against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done:"—whilst in our Saviour's resurrection the latter part was accomplished, as St. Paul teaches us in these words, "We declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise, which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second Psalm, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee." An expression this, as I before intimated, too strong and too elevated to be applied in its full force to David, or indeed to any other person than the only begotten Son of the eternal Father.

Thus again, to the same purpose may we remark on the 118th Psalm, which also is one of those appointed for the service of this day. In its original intention it appears to have been composed and sung by David or some other pious king of Israel, who is introduced, leading his people in solemn procession to the temple, there

to offer up the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, for a marvellous deliverance from his enemies, and a glorious victory obtained over them. But beneath this mystic veil, the eye of Faith discerns a more illustrious character, than the temporal prince of one particular, though favoured, people:—In “the stone,” which, though it was refused by the builders, became “the head stone of the corner,” the Christian believer, on the authority of repeated declarations in the New Testament, discovers, that his Saviour Jesus Christ was intended;—that he was indeed rejected and refused by the chief priests and Pharisees, the existing “builders” of the Church; but that he, being chosen of God and precious to him, though thus despised and rejected of men, was at length from his state of humiliation exalted to be the chief corner stone in the building, the main support of the edifice, and a centre of union for Jew and Gentile; the work of God, and the admiration of man. In *that day*, which the Lord is emphatically said to have “made,” and in which we are in an especial manner invited to “rejoice and be glad,” the Christian perceives to be intended that day, on which the stone, rejected of the builders, became the head of the corner. A morning then dawned, which is to be followed by no evening; a brighter sun arose upon the world, which is to set no more; a

day began, which will never end ; and night and darkness departed, to return not again. For thus saith the Lord to his church by the prophet Isaiah, “ Thy sun shall no more go down, neither shall thy moon withdraw itself, for the Lord shall be thy everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended.” It is Easter-day that we thus perceive to be in a peculiar manner consecrated to him, who by his resurrection on that day triumphed over death and hell. It is on Easter-day that we feel ourselves with peculiar propriety called upon to rejoice and be glad, for on that day, through faith, we partake of his triumph.

To these Psalms, which point to the exaltation of Christ, and to the subject of rejoicing, which is thereby furnished to Christians, I will add one other, though it does not enter into the service of *this* day ; although its application, I may say its exclusive application, to the event which we are now commemorating, is most strikingly and singularly obvious. “ I have set God always before me,” says the holy David in the 16th Psalm, “ for he is on my right hand, therefore I shall not fall. Wherefore my heart was glad and my glory rejoiced, my flesh also shall rest in hope. For why ? thou shalt not leave my soul in hell, neither shalt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou shalt shew me the path

of life ; in thy presence is the fulness of joy ; and at thy right hand there is pleasure for evermore.” It is evident that David could not speak these words of himself, “ for ” (that I may use the language of St. Paul) “ David after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption.” And St. Peter remarks to the same effect, “ Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. Therefore,” (adds the apostle, expressly asserting the prophetical design of the Psalmist) “ therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne ; he, seeing this before, spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption.” The failure of this Scripture if referred to the person of David, and its full accomplishment in that “ Jesus, whom God raised up on the third day,” are indeed so evident, that we need not be astonished that St. Peter, by means principally of this passage, added at one time unto the church about three thousand souls.

It is my hope that the above train of observation will not appear useless or foreign to the pre-

sent solemn season, when it shall be considered that the Psalms, which have been the subjects of discussion, are connected, either figuratively or directly, with the events, which we commemorate on Good-Friday and Easter-day ; events of such infinite importance as the death and resurrection of Christ. Many of you, aware already of this connexion, will not have been here presented with any new observations. But my object will have been attained, if any of the less informed amongst you shall have been led by this discourse to perceive, that the Psalms are not less interesting to the Christian than to the Jew ; and that they are deservedly introduced into the daily service of our Church, inasmuch as many of them must be considered as absolutely and exclusively prophetic : as many of those, which are in their primary sense historical, do at the same time contain predictions of the Messiah ; and as many of those, which declare the praises of the Lord for temporal blessings conferred upon Israel, are to be understood with reference to the eternal redemption of us, the true and more enlarged “ Israel of God,” through the death and resurrection of Christ.

I shall conclude with a beautiful and affecting passage, wherein a late excellent Bishop of our Church recommends these divine compositions to the diligent attention of his readers. Having

remarked that “ greatness confers no exemption from the cares and sorrows of life, but that its share of them frequently bears a melancholy proportion to its exaltation,” and having confirmed his observation by the example of David’s experience, “ who sought in piety that peace which he could not find in empire, and alleviated the disquietudes of state with the exercises of devotion,” the excellent and amiable Prelate thus proceeds to bear testimony to the character of the compositions of the Israelitish monarch. “ His invaluable Psalms convey those comforts to others, which they afforded to himself. Composed upon particular occasions, yet designed for general use ; delivered out as services for Israelites under the law, yet no less adapted to the circumstances of Christians under the Gospel ; they present religion to us in the most engaging dress ; communicating truths which philosophy could never investigate, in a style which poetry can never equal : while history is made the vehicle of prophecy, and creation lends all her charms to paint the glories of redemption. Calculated alike to profit and to please, they inform the understanding, elevate the affections, and entertain the imagination. Indited under the influence of Him, to whom all hearts are known and all events foreknown, they suit mankind in all situations, grateful as the manna which descended

from above and conformed itself to every palate. The fairest productions of human wit, after a few perusals, like gathered flowers, wither in our hands, and lose their fragrancý ; but these unfading plants of paradise become, as we are accustomed to them, still more and more beautiful ; their bloom appears to be daily heightened ; fresh odours are emitted ; and new sweets extracted from them. He, who hath once tasted their excellencies, will desire to taste them yet again ; and he, who tastes them oftenest, will relish them best."

I conclude with one of the collects from our Liturgy.

Blessed Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning, grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience, and comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ ; to whom, with thee and the Holy Ghost, three Persons and one God, be all honour, power, and praise, now, henceforth, and for ever. Amen.

The concluding extract is taken from the preface to Bishop Horne's Commentary on the Psalms : to which work the reader is referred for some passages in the Sermon, as well as for a more particular illustration of the subject, of which it treats.

S E R M O N XXXVIII.

THE EXTERMINATION OF THE CANAANITES AN EX-
AMPLE OF THE MORAL GOVERNMENT OF GOD.

DEUT. ix. 5.

Not for thy righteousness, or for the uprightness of thine heart, dost thou go to possess their land ; but for the wickedness of these nations the Lord thy God doth drive them out from before thee, and that he may perform the word which the Lord swore unto thy fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

It is a common artifice with the enemies of our holy faith, to direct their attacks against the writings of the Old Testament ; and thus to attempt to wound Christianity through the sides of the Jewish religion. The artifice is prudently contrived ; for whatever affects the claims of the Mosaic dispensation to a divine origin, must bear with equal weight upon the pretensions of the Christian ; nor is it destitute of a certain specious

Note. The following sermon was written before the publication of Dr. Paley's posthumous volume.

appearance, inasmuch as it is for the most part employed upon such transactions, recorded in the Old Testament, as bear perhaps a doubtful character, if they be regarded as the unauthorized acts of mere human agents, however satisfactorily they can be explained, when considered as the effects of the divine interposition. But this distinction is either overlooked by the objector, or intentionally withdrawn by him from observation: and he ignorantly or perversely brings forward, comments on, and condemns, as the contrivances and the operations of man, actions, which the very narratives, that record them, refer to the commands and the agency of the Almighty.

Of the nature of the transactions alluded to is the conduct of the people of Israel, first under Moses and then under Joshua, in invading the land of Canaan and exterminating the former inhabitants. Considered merely as the powerful leaders of a wandering nation, it may reasonably be questioned, and it might be difficult to reply to the question, what authority the Israelitish commanders had, other than that of force, what fair and legitimate right, to thrust themselves into countries, which had been long appropriated to their inhabitants by peaceable and hereditary succession; to destroy the proprietors, and to take possession of their land. Considered merely in

this view, it might be contended on one hand, and it must (I apprehend) be allowed on the other, that the invasion of Canaan under such circumstances would have been an unprincipled outrage, and the extermination of the Canaanites an atrocious and barbarous massacre. And there have not been wanting writers, by whom it has been thus represented : in France, not many years ago, with the most refined sarcasm ; and more recently, in our own country, with a familiarity of style adapted to the lowest and least improved capacities, and with all the scurrility of the most vulgar invective. If however the Israelitish leaders be considered, as what they professed, and what by signs and wonders and mighty deeds they proved, themselves to be, the instruments and ministers of the Almighty, their conduct then assumes a very different complexion : and the history of the settlement of the Jews in Canaan, instead of being the narrative of an unjustifiable and barbarous aggression, presents us with an impressive example of the moral government of God ; an example, abounding in considerations not of a mere speculative kind, but calculated at all times and in all places to inspire the sinner with alarm for the inevitable consequences of unrepented and unforsaken sin.

In the passage, recited for my text, wherein Moses explicitly and confidently ascribes the

driving out of the Canaanitish nations to the agency of the Lord God of Israel, he at the same time excludes his own followers from claiming any merit with the Almighty, and alleges two distinct causes for his interference : “ not for thy righteousness, or for the uprightness of thine heart, dost thou go to possess their land ; but for the wickedness of these nations the Lord thy God doth drive them out from before thee, and that he may perform the word which the Lord sware unto thy fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.”

Now these words of Moses, which may be regarded as a specimen of his ordinary language to the Israelites, give occasion to two general remarks. The former is, that, if he be considered in the light of a mere human commander, the style, in which he addressed his followers, was extremely impolitic and absurd. The latter is, that, considered as the minister of God, he spake with a dignity becoming the exalted station, which he occupied, and more especially in language calculated to glorify the divine attributes.

I. For, first, as a mere human commander, it would have been politic in Moses to ingratiate himself with his people by flattering their virtues, and concealing or palliating their vices : instead of which we perceive him resolutely denying their claim to virtuous distinctions, and branding

them as notorious and obstinate rebels. “Speak not thou in thine heart, after that the Lord thy God hath cast them out, saying, For my righteousness the Lord hath brought me in to possess this land :—Not for thy righteousness or for the uprightness of thine heart dost thou go to possess it : for thou art a stiffnecked people. Remember and forget not, how thou provokedst the Lord thy God to wrath in the wilderness ; from the day that thou didst depart out of the land of Egypt, until ye came unto this place, ye have been rebellious against the Lord¹.” It would have been politic in Moses, as a mere human commander, to raise their notions of their own prowess, and to encourage them to place confidence in their military strength : instead of which his language rather has the contrary tendency ; for he warns them to “beware, lest their heart be lifted up, and lest they say in their hearts, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth².” As a mere human commander, it would have been politic in him, to depreciate the nations, against whom his people were about to be led, and to represent them as less powerful and courageous than the Israelites : instead of this, he greatly exalts the nations, that were about to be invaded, to an

¹ Deut. ix. 7.² Deut. viii. 17.

eminence higher than the invaders, and as proverbially strong and warlike : “ Hear, O Israel ; thou art to pass over Jordan this day, to go in to possess nations greater and mightier than thyself, cities great and fenced up to heaven, a people great and tall, the children of the Anakims, whom thou knowest, and of whom thou hast heard say, Who can stand before the children of Anak ¹?”

But further, if such language as this was impolitic, as tending both to alienate the affections of the Israelites, and to damp their military ardour, another topic, on which Moses delighted to dwell, was, if he be considered in the same view, as a mere human commander, not impolitic only, but the extreme of folly and absurdity. For surely no man in his senses could have appealed in the presence of an assembled people to supernatural interposition in their behalf ; could have told them publicly to their faces, that “ their raiment waxed not old upon them, neither did their feet swell these forty years ² ;” could have reminded them that they had been refreshed by water miraculously “ brought out of the rock of flint,” and had been fed in the wilderness with “ manna which came down from heaven ³ :” had not the

¹ Deut. ix. 2.

² Deut. viii. 4.

³ Deut. viii. 16.

people, to whom he appealed, been conscious, that their raiment and their persons had been exempted from natural decay and infirmity, and that they had been providentially supported by supernatural and miraculous supplies.

II. But impolitic and even irrational as this language of Moses must appear, if he be considered in the light of a mere human commander, it is perfectly suited to the dignity of his character, as the minister of God. As such it became him to humble his people before the Almighty by a due sense of their sinfulness in disobeying God and provoking his anger ; and of their weakness and utter inability to defend and preserve themselves. As such it became him to point out the difficulty of the victories, they were about to be blessed with, that they might be the more sensible of that almighty hand, by which the victory was to be achieved. As such it became him to impress most deeply upon their minds the miraculous acts, by which they had been supported in their long wanderings through the wilderness ; that, as they could testify to the truth of the narrative, so also they might be filled with gratitude for the dangers they had escaped, and with confidence amid those which they were to encounter. As the minister of the Lord God it became him to magnify that high and lofty

Being, "whose he was and whom he served;" to extol his wonderful acts, and to glorify his perfections.

And such is the intention of the words of Moses, wherein he ascribes the extermination of the Canaanites, and the planting of the Israelites in their land, to the interposition of God, and assigns two specific causes for that interposition: "for the wickedness of these nations the Lord thy God doth drive them out from before thee, and that he may perform the word, which the Lord sware unto thy fathers." A particular attention to these causes will serve to illustrate the mercy, the holiness, the justice, the truth, the wisdom, and the goodness of God.

And, in the first place, as to the mercy of God, although a superficial view would hardly lead us to expect an example of it in such events as those, to which I am alluding, on a closer examination they present a conspicuous instance of God's long-suffering and forbearance. Four hundred and fifty years had now elapsed since the Lord had announced to Abraham his purpose of destroying the people of Canaan¹. During that period the inhabitants of the land had defiled themselves with idolatry, and every species of abomination; and, not content with

¹ Gen. xv. 16.

giving *themselves* up to such iniquity, aimed at extending their corruptions amongst their neighbours.

Yet during so great a period the long-suffering of God forbore to inflict the sentence of extermination upon them, “ corrupt as they nevertheless were, and become abominable in their wickedness.” But, when their iniquity was now full, the mercy and forbearance of God gave place to his holiness and his justice : to his *holiness*, in that “ he is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity” without displeasure ; and to his *justice*, in that “ he executeth judgment upon sinners.” It is upon this ground of retribution for their enormous wickedness, that Moses constantly places the extermination of the Canaanites. “ For the wickedness of these nations the Lord thy God doth drive them out from before thee.” And if ever the vengeance of the Almighty could be with reason judicially exercised against a people, surely it was in the case of such offenders as these, at the very mention of whose enormities nature turns away with abhorrence, and whose very land itself, as the word of God emphatically expresses it, “ vomited out her inhabitants” in disgust¹.

Suitable as the destruction of these people was

¹ Lev. xviii. 25.

to the holiness and justice of God, the divine *truth* also was pledged for their extirpation. He drove them out, "that he might perform the word, which he had sworn" to the fathers of the Israelites, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. When Abraham was but a stranger and a foreigner in the land, and God "gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on," even then did the Lord promise that he would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him, when they should have been afflicted by a bondage of four hundred years. The appointed period was now arrived for the fulfilment of his word : and the same act, whereby he manifested his righteous vengeance in visiting the iniquity of the Amorites, was the accomplishment of his gracious promise to the posterity of the faithful Abraham. From the accomplishment of that promise he would not be diverted by the rebellious spirit of the people, for whose establishment his word had been pledged : but, whilst he condemned them by the mouth of Moses for their numerous provocations, and expressly excepted against their having any claim to his favour by reason of their own righteousness, he brought them into the good land, which he had promised, for his loving mercy and for his truth's sake.

Whilst, by thus referring to what had previously taken place, we see the justice and truth of

the Almighty signally evinced, the prospect of the future discloses to us the divine *goodness* and *wisdom* employed in the same events. For the extermination of the Canaanites is to be regarded in the same light, in which we are taught to consider every judicial infliction of the divine vengeance; not only as a punishment imposed upon the criminal, but as an awful admonition to the survivors. About to be planted in the room of those, who were extirpated for their wickedness, the Israelites were called upon to read in the formidable destruction of their predecessors an awakening lesson* with respect to themselves. The ultimate accomplishment of God's covenant with their patriarchs was to depend upon their own obedience to his commandments. "Thou shalt remember the Lord thy God," said Moses, "that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day. And it shall be, if thou do at all forget the Lord thy God, and walk after other gods, and serve them, and worship them, I testify against you this day, that ye shall surely perish. As the nations, which the Lord destroyeth before your face, so shall ye perish; because ye would not be obedient unto the voice of the Lord your God¹." The overthrow of these idolatrous na-

¹ Deut. viii. 18—20.

tions, then, was in its relation to the Israelites a special testimony of that benevolent Providence, which had continually watched over them. To them the destroying angel of the Canaanites was not only the instrument of present prosperity, but a beacon to warn them against danger on the one hand, and on the other an earnest of future peace and success: and the arm of God, stretched out in fury over the devoted nations, was like the pillar of the cloud which went before the Hebrews on their passage out of Egypt, and “stood between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel;” when it “was a cloud and darkness to them, but gave light by night to these¹.”

Will it be observed, that, allowing the justice of these remarks, still some other means might have been employed by the Almighty for the completion of his purposes? and will it in continuation be demanded, why the Almighty did not choose some other means, than the arm of the people, who were to succeed the exterminated nations? The answer is neither remote, nor difficult to be discovered.

And first we reply, what of itself would be sufficient for the humble and pious enquirer, that this was the method which God in his

¹ Exod. xiv. 20.

wisdom chose, and that it is not for man to prescribe to his Creator, either what he shall do, or the means of doing it. The question of faithful Abraham, "shall not the Judge of all the earth do right¹?" is as applicable to the *means* employed by Providence, as it is to the *acts* which he performs.

But, secondly, although God is not accountable to man for his actions, (God forbid he should be!) yet he does not disdain to refer his counsels to our own sense of equity, and to invite us to judge, as it were, between Him and ourselves². He has created us reasonable beings; and he encourages us to exercise our reason, provided it be kept in due subserviency to what he has revealed concerning himself and his perfections. Proceeding then a step farther, than we ventured in the former answer, we may, I apprehend, confidently affirm, that the means, adopted by the Almighty for the extermination of the Canaanites, were to our conception, in general at least, as well adapted to the end, as any other, and in some particular respects had even greater propriety, than any other instrument of the divine vengeance.

It is the language of revelation, and the natural sense of man in his unenlightened state

¹ Gen. xviii. 25.

² Isaiah v. 3.

concurs in uttering the same sentiment, that the sword, no less than the famine and the pestilence, is an instrument in the hand of God, whereby he executes his fury upon sinful nations¹. Assuming then, what has already been noticed, that the wickedness of the Canaanites was enormous, and that they were therefore deserving objects of God's wrath, it may be difficult to prove, and we may leave the proof of the negative to the objector, why the sword of the Israelites was not as well adapted on a *general* view, as any other instrument of the divine vengeance, to exterminate the idolaters of Canaan?

In the mean while, there are certain considerations, which fix upon this in particular a *special* and *peculiar* propriety. It was a more convincing proof of the divine interposition, than would have been furnished by the intervention of a natural scourge. It was a more signal evidence that the Lord God of Israel went before his people, as "a consuming fire," when he employed the agency of a tribe, weak and unwarlike in comparison, to "overthrow cities great and fenced up to heaven²," and to "possess nations greater and mightier than themselves³." It was more specifically an act of retributive justice

¹ Jer. xiv. 12.² Deut. ix. 1.³ Deut. iv. 38.

upon the guilty nations, when the very people, among whom they had endeavoured to spread their corrupt and iniquitous practices, were employed as the instruments of their punishment. "Vex the Midianites, and smite them," said the Lord to Moses, assigning at the same time the cause, and pointing out the equity, of the penalty; "for they vex you with their wiles, wherewith they have beguiled you¹." And it was more pointedly an admonition to the Israelites, to beware how they departed from their allegiance to the Lord God, and fell away into the idolatry and other abominable customs of their predecessors, when they themselves were entrusted with the execution of that righteous judgment, which was passed upon the people of Canaan, and which, if they adopted the iniquities of the Canaanites, was to be no less certainly executed upon them.

The foregoing remarks will, I trust, exhibit the subjects, which are brought before us in the proper lessons selected from the Old Testament at this season of the year, in their true colours; and justify the conduct of Moses by shewing, that he acted as the minister of the Almighty, and that the transactions, in which he was engaged, were worthy of being com-

¹ Numb. xxv. 18.

manded by that perfect Being, with whose commission he had been specially invested. I shall here therefore conclude with recommending to your attention, and especially to the attention of those, if any such be present, who are accustomed to think or speak with levity on the subject that has been passing in review before us, the pious, the humane, and judicious observation of a living Bishop of our Church in a work, which completely exposes the ignorance and folly, as well as the blasphemy and impiety, of a late pretender to superior illumination. “From the abuse of the Bible,” said the learned Author of an Apology or Defence of that holy book, “you proceed to that of Moses, and again bring forward the subject of his wars in the land of Canaan. There are many men, who look upon all war (would to God that all men saw it in the same light !) with extreme abhorrence, as afflicting mankind with calamities not necessary, shocking to humanity, and repugnant to reason. But is it repugnant to reason, that God should by an express act of his providence destroy a wicked nation? I am fond of considering the goodness of God, as the leading principle of his conduct towards mankind; of considering his justice as subservient to his mercy. He punishes individuals and nations with the rod of his wrath: but I am persuaded

that all his punishments originate in his abhorrence of sin, are calculated to lessen its influence, and are proofs of his goodness ; inasmuch as it may not be possible for Omnipotence itself to communicate supreme happiness to the human race, whilst they continue servants of sin. The destruction of the Canaanites exhibits to all nations, in all ages, a signal proof of God's displeasure against sin ; it has been to others, and it is to ourselves, a benevolent warning. Moses would have been the wretch you represent him, had he acted by his own authority alone : but you may as reasonably attribute cruelty and murder to the judge of the land in condemning criminals to death, as butchery and massacre to Moses in executing the command of God ¹."

¹ Bishop Watson's *Apology for the Bible*, page 79—81.

S E R M O N X X X I X .

THE EFFICACY OF PRAYER TO THE FATHER IN CHRIST'S NAME.

JOHN xvi. 23.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you.

It is natural to man to feel his own weakness. Continually in want of things, which he cannot procure by his own power, and continually surrounded with difficulties, which by his own power he cannot remove or overcome, it is impossible but that he must be sensible of his imperfections. In the common course of things it must be so. It is also natural to man to look up to a Being more powerful than himself, for that support in his difficulties, and for that supply of his wants, which his own abilities are not capable of furnishing. I call it natural ; for a sense not only of the existence of a power above us, but also of our dependence upon it, appears to be implanted in

us by Providence. And accordingly in every age, and in the most remote countries of the world, and in every state of civilization, we find men all agreeing together in asking blessings from some being or beings, whom they suppose more powerful than themselves.

But the corruption and folly of our nature, and, at the same time, our misery in our natural state, are in nothing perhaps more impressively manifested, than in the circumstances, which attend the religious worship of those nations, that have not been enlightened by the dayspring from on high. Look to the *objects*, to which that worship is addressed; and you will find them such, as cannot be contemplated without disgust by reason or by religion: “images made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things¹.” Look to the *manner*, in which that worship is paid; and you will find it suitable to the objects, to which it is offered, but totally unworthy of being offered by a reasonable creature like man, much more of being presented to a Being of infinite perfections as God. Look again to the *hope of benefits* to be derived from such religious worship, and on what authority does it rest? The heathen, who offers his prayers to his imaginary deities, has no

¹ Rom. i. 23.

assurance, that those deities are either able or willing to hear him and assist him. It is a sense of his own impotence, rather than a well-grounded persuasion of their power, which induces him to entreat their assistance: his prayer is the language of despair, when he looks to himself, rather than of confidence, when he looks to them. He prays because he knows and feels, that he is unable to help himself: but he does not know, that his imaginary gods will or can help him.

As the Gospel of Christ has been and is "a light to lighten the Gentiles" in all other particulars relating to the nature of God and the welfare of man, so in this more especially it is intended to give us that instruction, which in our natural state was hidden from our eyes. Taking for its foundation those feelings, which God appears to have interwoven with our existence, namely, a sense of our own weakness and our desire of superior assistance, it directs us in the right way of procuring the assistance which we want; and it assures us, that if we walk in that way, the assistance shall certainly be granted. "Verily, verily," saith our blessed Lord, "I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it to you." Was the heathen ignorant of the *object*, to which his religious worship should be paid? Our Saviour tells us, that we must ask the Father, "that

uncorruptible God," whose "glory the heathen changed into a corruptible image, whose truth they changed into a lie; whose seat is in heaven, and whose kingdom ruleth over all." Did the heathen mistake the *manner*, in which religious worship is to be offered? Our Saviour tells us, to ask the Father in *his* name, "who is the one Mediator between God and man." Had the heathen no well-grounded *hope*, no reasonable *assurance*, that his worship would be accepted and his petitions granted? Our Saviour promises, in terms admirably qualified to dispel all apprehensions as to the success of our entreaties, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you."

1. Considering the words before us in these three divisions, they direct our thoughts in the first place to that perfect Being, to whom our prayers must be offered. "Ye shall ask the Father." And to whom can they with any appearance of propriety be offered but to that God, who is the Father and Lord of all, "who by his excellent wisdom made the heavens, and who upholdeth all things by the word of his power."

He is described in the text under the appellation of "the Father." Consider him as such. Consider him, as *the Father of the universe*: to him belong "the kingdom, the power, and the glory:" his is the dominion over all things; his

is the power of disposing of all things at his will ; to him is due all the glory, which his humble creatures are capable of giving by the expression of their lowly submission to his authority, and reliance upon his bounty, in prayer. Consider him as *the Father of mankind*, whom he formed in his own image, after his own likeness, and bestowed upon them the gift of reason : in whose service can that reason be employed as a religious exercise, but in devout adoration of its Author ? Consider him again as *the Father of his redeemed*, of those whom he hath “ elected according to his foreknowledge through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience, and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ¹ : ” what blessing and worship are not due to him, “ who according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for them, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time² ? ” Once more : consider him as *the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*, whom out of his free and unbounded love to the world he sent into the world, that whosoever believeth in him should not

¹ 1 Pet. i. 2.² 1 Pet. i. 4.

perish, but have everlasting life : and how can we refrain from lifting up our hearts to him in prayer and adoration and thanksgiving, believing, that “ he who spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, shall with him also freely give us all things ?” Thus considering Almighty God, as his blessed Son hath been pleased to denominate him, under the appellation of *the Father* ; and in the several relations, which under that appellation he bears, as the Father of the universe, as the Father of mankind, as the Father of Christians, as the Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ ; it appears that unto him we ought to “ give the honour due unto his name,” that it is he whom we are to “ worship in the beauty of holiness.”

One thing only I would remark under this head, as a caution against those who would infer from the text before us, that, whereas we are here directed to offer our prayers to the Father, we ought not therefore to offer them to the Son ; namely, that we are elsewhere told by him, who here directs us to ask of the Father, that “ all men should honour the Son even as they honour the Father¹,” and that he assigns the reasons of the duty when he assures us, that “ he and the Father are one².” In fact, the New Testament

¹ John v. 23.

² John x. 30.

continually represents Christ to be the object of religious worship as well as God the Father : nor, if prayer is not to be made unto him, is it possible to account for the conduct of the apostle St. Paul during his life, or of the first martyr St. Stephen at his death, “ full,” as they both were, “ of the Holy Ghost.”

2. But to proceed. When we offer our prayers to God the Father, we are to offer them *in the name of the Son* : “ Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name,” saith Christ in the text : and herein he was only repeating what he had already told his apostles more than once in the course of this his farewell exhortation to them, before he was to be taken away. And thus St. Paul, applying the same direction to another branch of religious worship, namely, the giving of thanks for mercies received, admonishes the Ephesians to “ give thanks always for all things unto God and the Father, *in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*¹ :” and again, more generally to the Colossians, “ Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all *in the name of the Lord Jesus*, giving thanks to God and the Father by him².”

To pray to the Father *in the name of Christ*, may lead our thoughts to several important par-

¹ Eph. v. 20.

² Col. iii. 17.

ticalars in the discharge of our religious duties, as necessary to make our prayers an acceptable service.

To pray in the name of Christ is in its first and most obvious signification, to make open mention of him in our prayers : to offer them to the Father in and through his meritorious name, and to appear with him for our Mediator at the throne of grace. No better model for our devotions can be found, than those forms of prayer, which the Church prescribes in her Liturgy : and as in others, so in this particular, those forms are very deserving of our attention, in that they always teach us to present ourselves before our almighty and merciful Father *in the name* of his well-beloved Son.

Again, to pray in the name of Christ is not only to make open mention of him in our prayers, but to place a real and heartfelt reliance upon his merits alone, to recommend us to his heavenly Father. Unworthy as we are to appear in the presence of that Being, whose name is Holy, and who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, by the imputed righteousness of Christ we become well-pleasing in his sight. It is that righteousness alone, which can recommend us to Almighty God, and it is that alone, which we must plead in our recommendation, not with our lips only, but in our hearts.

Further ; to pray in the name of Christ carries

with it an obligation to imitate that humility of soul, that submission of will and inclination, which in his human character he set us the example of practising. "Not my will," said he in that character to his heavenly Father, "not my will, but thine be done!" Earnestly as we may desire that, which we pray to have granted, we must desire it with all resignation to Him, whose will it should be our most earnest desire and longing to perform : nor, without such a submission of our will to his, can we be truly said to pray in the name of Christ, inasmuch as without it we cannot be truly said to be his disciples and followers.

To pray in the name of Christ may be understood as implying moreover that we pray with a stedfast resolution to obey the laws of Him, to whom we are petitioning for mercies. "When in the days of his flesh, Christ had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared¹," or "for his piety," as it is rendered in the margin of our Bibles ; "though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered." And if his piety was a recommendation even of his prayers to his heavenly Father, what are we

¹ Heb. v. 7.

that we should presume to "name his name"¹ in our addresses to the throne of grace, unless we "depart from iniquity," and imitate the piety which he hath set before us, and the obedience which he learned, that he might become the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him? "Them that honour me," saith the Lord God, "I will honour²:" but "the prayers of the wicked are an abomination³," both to the Father, to whom they are offered, and to the Son, in whose name the offering is pretended to be made.

Furthermore; to pray in the name of Christ may be interpreted as involving the necessity of praying with the gracious help of his holy Spirit. "God gave not the Spirit by measure unto him⁴:" but he attended him in unbounded fullness throughout his sufferings, until he enabled him to "offer himself without spot unto God⁵;" and, together with the blood, wherewith he sealed his sacrifice for sin, to pour forth those petitions of pious resignation and universal charity, which he uttered whilst he was hanging on the cross. That our prayers may be heard, we must "worship God in spirit and in truth; for the Father seeketh such to worship him⁶."

¹ Heb. v. 8.

² 1 Sam. ii. 30.

³ Prov. xv. 8.

⁴ John iii. 34.

⁵ Heb. ix. 14.

⁶ John iv. 23.

Weak as we are by nature, this is what we cannot do without his preventing and assisting grace : but by receiving the adoption of sons, by being admitted into the family of our heavenly Father and made joint-heirs with Christ, his grace becomes sufficient for us ; his strength is made perfect in our weakness. And “ because we are sons, God sendeth forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, whereby we cry Abba, Father¹. ”

Lastly, to pray in the name of Christ supposes us to pray with a full assurance of hope and faith, that by virtue of his precious blood-shedding and of his powerful mediation and intercession with the Father, our prayers will be heard at the throne of grace. Faith in him, as the one Mediator between God and man ; faith in him, as having “ died for our sins, and risen again for our justification,” and as “ ever living to make intercession for us ;” in a word, faith in him, as being “ able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him ;” is especially and indispensably necessary to us, if we would pray to the Father in Christ's name. We must confess him, we must trust in his merits, we must follow his humility, we must copy his obedience, we must partake of his Spirit ; but as the founda-

¹ Rom. viii. 15.

tion and spring of all, we must believe that he saveth his people from their sins, heretofore by his death, and now by his mediation.

3. To them, who thus ask of the Father in the Son's name, an *assurance* is given, that their prayers shall be favourably received. "Verily, verily, I say unto you," these are the words of the Son himself, "whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he shall give it you." What language can be stronger? What promise can be more satisfactory? "Verily, verily, I say unto you." It is introduced with that solemn preface, which our blessed Saviour appears to have employed on this and on some other occasions, to convince us of the absolute certainty of that which he declares. Nor can we doubt it without doubting the veracity of him, who "for this end was born, and for this cause came into the world, that he should bear witness unto the truth¹."

Is it true then, that, literally speaking, *whatsoever* we ask of God, he will give us? that we can pray for nothing, but that it will be granted? Such is not the meaning of the promise. We may ask for many things, sinful in themselves, or hurtful in the application of them. These

¹ John xviii. 37.

things then are not to be expected, as if they were implied in the promise of Christ; for it is the end of all the dispensations of our heavenly Father, to promote his own glory and therein the holiness and happiness of his people. But in this sense the promise is to be understood, that, if they are conducive to the promotion of God's glory, and to the present welfare and future salvation of our souls, "all these things he will give us." In desiring these things we cannot err; and these things we may be assured will be granted us, if we pray as Christ commands. As to all other things, they ought to be regarded by us only as means, whereby those great ends may be attained: whatever may appear to us the best means for attaining them, it is reasonable that we should pray for: but still we should always pray with a firm persuasion, that our own judgment as to the means must be infinitely below that of "the Judge of all the earth;" and we should therefore be convinced, that, however he may appear to refuse our petitions, he is really and effectually granting them, although we may not always in this life be permitted to see the accomplishment of the grant.

This I say, in order to clear the objection, which may be, and often is, made against prayer, that the effects of it are not to be per-

ceived. Often perhaps they are not perceptible to the bodily eye, and can only be discerned by the eye of faith, which discerns the fulfilment of the spirit of a petition, where it may not be agreeable to the divine wisdom to vouchsafe a compliance with its letter. Often however they may be perceived, where the efficacy of prayer is written in characters of more plain and direct accomplishment : not rarely in the enjoyment of temporal blessings : but more certainly and more signally in those of a spiritual kind, which are vouchsafed to the people of God ; in hearty repentance for past sins, and a steadfast faith in the blood of the Redeemer ; in heavenly affections, and a virtuous and godly life ; in the putting off of the old man, and in the putting on of the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness ; in the renewing of the spirit of the mind ; in purity of heart, and sanctification of spirit ; in humility and resignation ; in conscientious exertions for the glory of God and the benefit of our brethren ; in the communion and testimony of the Holy Ghost ; in the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, and keepeth the heart and mind through Christ Jesus. These are some of the blessings, which the Father giveth in this life to them that ask in his Son's name. They are

such things as the world cannot give. Their nature bespeaks their origin. Like him, who purchased them with his blood, they come down from heaven ; they are the gifts of that blessed Comforter, whom he sent to supply his place with his humble followers, and to abide with them for ever. They are blessings, which those, who weigh them in the balance of the sanctuary, esteem greater than all the kingdoms of the world, and richer than all the glory of them. They are a present evidence of the favour of God in this life ; and an earnest of salvation in another.

Let us then, my brethren, fail not to “ask the Father in his Son’s name” for these his most inestimable benefits ; these treasures of the kingdom of heaven. These things if we faithfully ask, he will assuredly grant us : and if we be possessed of these, whatsoever else it may please him in his wisdom to give or to take away, we shall still have ample reason to “bless the name of the Lord.”

Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be glory in the Church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages world without end. Amen.

Almighty God, who hast promised to hear the

petitions of them that ask in thy Son's name ; We beseech thee mercifully to incline thine ears to us, that have made now our prayers and supplications unto thee ; and grant that those things, which we have faithfully asked according to thy will, may effectually be obtained, to the relief of our necessity, and to the setting forth of thy glory ; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

SERMON XL.

THE LOVE OF GOD MANIFESTED BY THE SENDING
OF HIS SON.

I JOHN iv. 8.

God is love.

AND do we need the declaration of a voice from heaven to assure us that he is so? Can we look into ourselves or about us, and not read manifest testimonies to the same fundamental truth? Can we consider, that it was God's hand, which made and preserves us; that it is from him, that we derive all our powers and all our opportunities of enjoyment; that in him, not we alone, but all the animate creation, "live and move and have their being;" that from him all the goodly things around us are, and were created: can we consider these numerous evidences to the goodness of the Creator, and yet stand in need of a special messenger from heaven to assure us, that "God is love?" We can; we do. For bene-

volent and gracious as God appears in the creation and preservation of the natural world, it is not in creating and preserving us, that the most glorious attestation to this, his most adorable attribute, is to be found. It is to be found in that stupendous display of loving-kindness, which is revealed to us by himself in his holy word ; which, as no effort of human reason could have discovered it, prophets were inspired to foretell, and apostles commissioned to publish ; which angels announced from heaven ; which the Son of God himself descended to make known ; and to which the Spirit of God bore witness by signs and wonders and mighty deeds.

Accordingly the beloved disciple, in the passage preceding my text, being engaged in an exhortation to mutual affection among Christians, and grounding his exhortation upon the perfectness of the divine love, immediately subjoins the mention of that amazing dispensation of goodness, wherein the love of God was most conspicuously manifested. "In this," saith he, "was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him." As if he had said, Other instances of the divine benevolence are indeed present to the mind of him, who will open his eyes to see them. But this is the mightiest and supreme of all : "herein" in

an especial manner "is love." "God hath never left himself without witness, in that he doth good, and giveth us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness:" but "in this," more especially and to a much higher degree, "was manifested the love of God toward us." He loved us, for he gave us life, and all things necessary for the preservation of it: but still more clearly does it appear, that he loved us, by the spiritual life, with which he supplies us: for that "being dead in trespasses and sins," he hath provided the means of quickening us and supporting us with living food, by sending his only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.

There is singular force in the expression employed by the apostle, when he says, that "God is LOVE." He does not say, that God is *benevolent*, or *kind*, or *merciful*, or *compassionate*, or *affectionate*: he does not say, that God is *a being of infinite goodness*, or *mercy*, or *loving-kindness*: but, as if he intended to magnify above measure this most adorable of the divine attributes, he pronounces him to be the quality in the abstract, and thus, as it were, identifies the Godhead with love. Of that perfect Being indeed, who declares of himself "I am that I am," and who describes "I am" as his characteristic appella-

tion ¹, the same might equally well be affirmed, with respect to his other properties. It might as well be affirmed concerning him, that he is *power*, or *holiness*, or *wisdom*, or *justice*, or any other quality, the effects of which are displayed in his operations. But I do not remember, that this form of expression is employed by any of the sacred writers, in so pointed a manner, as by St. John in the text; where a special mark of distinction appears to be set on that quality of God, which the Holy Spirit describes as having actuated him in the redemption of mankind.

With the divine blessing we will consider the several parts of the evidence, adduced in the following verse, of the love of God having been manifested toward us, in illustration of the proposition in my text, that "God is love."

"In this," says St. John, "was manifested the love of God towards us, because that God sent his only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him." We shall accordingly have to consider, 1st, the Being, here spoken of, as having sent: 2dly, Him, who was sent: 3dly, Whither he was sent: and, lastly, for what purpose he was sent.

1. Now, with respect to that BEING, whom we call God, it is certain, that, infinite as he is in

¹ Exod. iii. 14.

all his perfections, our limited understandings can comprehend only a very small portion of his excellence. "The heaven of heavens cannot contain him : " still less can his nature be compassed by the little span of the human mind. Yet of thus much we are assured concerning him, that he is great and happy, in a degree incomparably beyond what we can conceive of greatness and happiness : in a word, that his power is such, as to be incapable of being controlled, and that his happiness is such, that nothing can enhance or augment it.

And these are two of the divine attributes, which, when we reflect on the Godhead by himself, tend most satisfactorily to prove his benevolence, in condescending to interfere for the salvation of mankind. In our intercourse with our fellow-creatures, we are used, and with reason, to esteem a kindness the more, the more exalted is the station of him who confers it : and still more do we esteem it, when we are persuaded, that it is altogether of a disinterested kind, and not calculated to produce any accession of good to him, by whom it is conferred. Let us take this rule to guide us, in estimating the divine benevolence. Let us reflect upon God as a Being, infinitely great, infinitely happy ; and let us then consider, how vast must be his condescension, how inconceivable must be his

goodness, to concern himself about the welfare of men ! “ The Lord is high above all heathen ; and his glory above the heavens. Who is like unto the Lord our God, that hath his dwelling so high ; and yet humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven and earth ? ”

So strange indeed did it appear to an ancient sect of philosophers, for the Deity to withdraw himself, as it were, from the enjoyment of his own felicity, and to interfere in the concerns of this lower world, that, whilst they acknowledged the being, they denied the providence, of God. Better instructed, than they could possibly be, in the nature of the Deity by the revelation, which He himself has vouchsafed to give us, let us from that difficulty, which caused infidelity to the unenlightened heathen, derive matter of devout gratitude and exultation : and firmly persuaded of the fact, that God does take care for men, and combining it with a devout sense of his unbounded greatness and happiness, let us contemplate in it a proof of the assertion, that “ God is love.”

2. From the Sender, let us turn our thoughts, 2dly, to HIM, *who was sent*. “ God sent his only-begotten Son.” And whom could he send, equal in dignity, equal in merit, to that Son, “ who, being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person,” was the object of adoration

to the inhabitants of heaven, and partook of the throne and sceptre of his Father? The whole scheme of man's redemption by Christ Jesus, is a mystery, which angels may well desire to look into, and which men should account it their highest privilege, and their most exquisite spiritual delight, to admire with reverential awe. Nor is it the least stupendous part of the mystery, that the person, sent upon earth to perform the work of man's redemption, should be "the only-begotten Son of God."

Of the nature of that relation, which subsists between Him and the Father, it is impossible for us rightly to conceive; and it is neither discreet in us, nor pious to indulge in ineffectual conjectures. But of this I think we may be certain, that the language, which the Holy Spirit employs, to designate the relation between the Sender and the Sent, is intended to raise to the highest possible pitch our ideas of the dignity of our Redeemer, and in consequence to exalt proportionably our sense of the divine benevolence, which actuated his heavenly Father to the work.

The greatest trial, which human nature can sustain, is perhaps the loss of a son, of an only son. This was the trial, by which Almighty God thought fit to prove the faith of Abraham; and it was because Abraham "withheld not his son, his only son," but would have sacrificed him

in obedience to the divine command, that he was visited with especial blessings from the Almighty, and called “the friend of God.” In considering the person employed about the great work of our salvation, it appears to be intended, that we should thus reason from the analogy of earthly relations, and form our estimate of the greatness of the love of God, from the nearness of the relation subsisting between him and his only-begotten Son, whom he sent. To this mode of reasoning, St. Paul directs us, when he demands, “He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things¹?” plainly intimating his persuasion, that the greatest possible testimony of affection was herein given by our heavenly Father, and that every other exercise of loving-kindness might be confidently expected from Him, who had not entrusted the work of our redemption to any created agent, but had sent his Son, his only-begotten Son.

3. And whither, let us in the third place consider; whither was this divine person, this only-begotten Son of the eternal Father, He, who in the beginning was with God, and was God; *whither was he sent?* He was sent “into the world:” a world, which was altogether “lying

¹ Rom. viii. 32.

in wickedness ;” a world, which was in hostility with his Father, and which neither knew nor loved God ; a world, polluted by hereditary corruption, and depraved by voluntary and personal guilt ; a world, altogether unworthy of him before his coming, and which despised and rejected him, when he came.

It is always esteemed one of the most convincing proofs of affection, for a man to submit to much personal inconvenience, in behalf of those whom he loves : and further, affection is then most unequivocal, because it is most disinterested, when it is exercised freely for the benefit of undeserving objects ; of those, who can advance no claim upon its exercise, and can offer nothing in return. How unbounded, in this respect again, how great, how disinterested, appears the love of God ! That he should send his only-begotten Son into the world, a world of sin and of misery : that that Son should divest himself (as it were) of his natural pre-eminence above all created beings, of his equality with his Father, and take upon him the likeness and nature of man, the form and condition of a servant ;—that he should quit the bosom of his Father’s love, to be imprisoned in the womb of an earthly mother ;—that he should descend from the right hand of the majesty on high, to wander destitute upon earth, without having where to lay his head ;—that he

should withdraw from the worship of the angels, to be exposed to all the artifices of the powers of darkness, and to bear the contradiction of perverse and sinful men ; to be associated with the vilest of mankind, to be acquainted with misery and grief, to be scorned and derided, to be trampled on and reviled, to be condemned and executed by an accursed death : O my brethren ! what tongue can tell the noble acts of the Lord and shew forth all his praise ! what human intellect is “ able to comprehend the breadth and length and depth and height ” of this amazing condescension ; and “ to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge.”

4. But whilst we thus contemplate with amazement the scene, to which the Son of God was sent, let us not forget, my brethren, to turn our thoughts to the purpose *for which he was sent*, as a farther testimony that God is love. “ He was sent that we might live through him : ” for us men, and for our salvation he came down from heaven. How unworthy we were of his intercession, has been already incidentally noticed : we, who were slaves of the devil, and sold under sin : we, who were corrupt and become abominable in our doings : of whom it may be said, that we had in us nothing to recommend us to his mercy, but our very helpless and desperate condition. It is by this argument, that St. Paul sets

forth the loving-kindness of God. “ Scarcely for a *righteous* man will one die : yet peradventure for a *good* man some will even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that while we were yet *sinner*s, Christ died for us :” while we were yet sinners, or, as he presently adds in an equivalent phrase, “ when we were *enemies* :” for all sin is a state of enmity against the divine commandments, which are “ holy, just, and good ;” and the sinner, as such, is of necessity the enemy of God.

And, as the love of God is thus manifested, in that we were his enemies, for whose salvation his Son was sent, so is it moreover manifested by the greatness of the salvation, which was wrought by his coming : a salvation, *great* in every particular respect : great, in respect to its *extent*, freely offered to the whole race of mankind, to every individual of that nature, which the Son of God assumed, that “ as in Adam all die, even so in Christ might all be made alive :”—great, in respect of the *deliverance*, which it affords from our spiritual adversaries, from the world, the flesh, and the devil, from the bondage of sin in this world, and from death, the wages of sin, in another :—great, in respect of the *means of grace*, which it now affords us, and of the *all-sufficient aid* of Christ’s holy *Spirit*, to overcome our natural weakness and corruption ;—and great,

abundantly great, in respect of *the hope of everlasting glory*, which it reveals to those, who shall hereafter be admitted into his presence. “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God : for if sons, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ : if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.”

We have thus considered, cursorily and briefly, as the present opportunity will permit, the proposition of the apostle, that “God is love,” as illustrated by the several particulars in the following verse, where he asserts, that “in this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.” The moral perfections of the Deity are, in our contracted sphere, and to the extent of our capacities, the fittest objects for our imitation ; and they are so frequently and so largely set before us in holy Scripture, undoubtedly for this reason in common with others, that, by striving to imitate them with the assistance of his grace, our corrupt and sinful nature may be continually purified, and we may become more and more like unto him. Of all these adorable perfections, as there is no one, in which our heavenly Father appears to be more delighted, so also there is no

one, more carefully recommended for our example, or more adapted to our continual imitation, than that, which we have been at present considering. As it was “love,” which actuated our heavenly Father to send his Son into the world for our redemption, so has he enjoined upon us the cultivation of that divine quality, as the indispensable *duty*, and the distinguishing and never failing *mark*, of every disciple of his Son. “We love him, because he first loved us.” “Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.” Thus does the beloved disciple connect the duty of a Christian, in its two great divisions of religious and moral obligation, with this most adorable attribute of the Deity, illustrated in one of the most interesting and important articles of the Christian faith. Nor can we desire or possess a more powerful inducement to the diligent observance of this duty, than the assurance of the same apostle, that “God is love; and that he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him.”

Lord of all power and might, who art the author and giver of all good things; Graft in our hearts the love of thy name, increase in us true religion, nourish us with all goodness, and of thy great mercy keep us in the same, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

SERMON XLI.

PRIDE CONTRASTED WITH HUMILITY.

1 PET. v. 5.

Be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.

It was one great intention of our holy religion, considered as a rule of conduct, to give us clear and correct notions of those qualities, which contribute to form the character of the human heart. By the corruption of our nature, which ensued upon the disobedience of our first progenitor, not only our inclination to the practice of what is good, but our power likewise of discriminating justly between good and evil, was materially impaired. Hence various qualities are continually exhibited to general observation by such, as the world is contented to esteem its masters of wisdom, in colours very different from those, which properly belong to them: and they are accordingly valued in the general

estimation, and cultivated in general practice, with degrees of respect very disproportionate to their intrinsic merits. Captivated by specious appearances, and insensible to substantial worth, the man of the world places himself under the control of qualities, vicious in their nature, and injurious in their tendency: whilst he disdainfully rejects the authority of those, which alone can bear the test of sober investigation; and which are the main promoters, under Providence, of the comfort and happiness of mankind, as well as the most secure defence and the most delightful ornament of their possessor.

To counteract so formidable an error, Christianity comes to our assistance. By the light of divine revelation it enables us accurately to discriminate between good and evil, right and wrong: it teaches us to see things according to their own nature and in their proper colours: to behold those qualities, which are really vicious, deprived of the dazzling brightness, wherewith reason, impaired by passion, had invested them; and to contemplate those, which are virtuous, disencumbered from the clouds of worldly prejudice, and arrayed in their native beauty. In a word, it teaches us to see things, as they are in the sight of God, and not as they appear according to the erroneous conceptions of men.

The apostle in the text directs our attention to two qualities of the human heart, respectively of the different characters to which I have been alluding: the one, of high estimation in a worldly view, but branded by the Gospel with marks of especial reprobation; the other, disdained indeed and despised by the worldly man, but ranked by the inspired ministers of God among the most lovely and the most valuable of Christian graces. In their operation upon human life, and in their effect upon the blessings which we enjoy, and upon the distresses under which we suffer, these qualities are of infinite importance to the peace and happiness of individuals and of society. So that indeed, in the whole range of evil properties, which the holy Scriptures instruct us to avoid, and of good properties, which they exhort us to cultivate, it may be doubted, whether there be any, which more powerfully demand our attention in the large and comprehensive influence which they respectively maintain over our welfare, than pride and humility. By considering them, as they are here set before us by the apostle, in conjunction, and exhibiting the hateful character of the one and the loveliness of the other in the way of contrast, we shall probably be the more strongly induced to adopt and observe the pre-

cept, for the enforcing of which the qualities are thus set in opposition. With the blessing of God therefore I propose in the present discourse, first to bring the two qualities in succession somewhat fully before you ; and then to conclude with enforcing the precept, that you “be all clothed with humility.”

I. And, 1st, that we may take up the view of pride from its origin, whence did it commence but from him, who is the author of all evil? Pride is an overweening opinion of our own dignity, and a proportionate deficiency in due respect and esteem for others. And what was it but this, which filled the heart of Satan, when, arrogantly rebelling against Him, who is King of kings and Lord of lords, he strove to exalt his throne above the stars of God, and to liken himself to the most Highest? Of those wonderful events, which took place in the invisible world, in the world of spirits, before the creation of man, the word of truth supplies us with no detailed information ; doubtless, because such information would not be for our profit. Some particulars however are incidentally told us of the fallen angels ; as that “they sinned, and kept not their first estate or principality, but left their own habitation ; wherefore God spared them not, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be

reserved unto the judgment of the great day¹:" an awful warning to all those, to whom their fate is revealed; a tremendous example of the sinfulness and danger of pride, the sin by which they fell.

2dly. As pride introduced rebellion into heaven, so was it the passion, by which the same dreadful effect was introduced on earth. The devil, who had fatally experienced its influence on himself, judged that it might with success be exerted on our first parents. "Ye shall not surely die," said he; "for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil²." The experiment succeeded. Proudly desirous of rising to a degree of distinction, which his bountiful Creator had not seen fit to grant, man was guilty of disobedience: and the first discovery which he made, a discovery, which sooner or later pride will always be brought to make, was of his real weakness and misery. "The eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked³."

3dly. As pride, through the artifice of the devil, brought disobedience and sin into the world, it has ever been one of the leading principles, by which he has continued to actuate his

¹ Jude 6.² Gen. iii. 5.³ Gen. iii. 7.

children. Together with “the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes,” in other words, sensuality and covetousness, there is no passion which more powerfully works in the children of disobedience, which more imperiously rules over those who are devoted to the world, than “the pride of life.” You trace it in either sex and in every age. Infinitely varied in its objects, and exhibiting itself under a boundless diversity of appearances, it bears sway in every worldly and carnal heart. Superiority of bodily endowments, health, strength, or beauty; superiority of mental distinction, more powerful talents or more extensive acquirements; the accidental superiority of fortune, rank, honour, or power; nay, what may seem too incongruous to be supposed true, superiority (at least a fancied superiority) in religious attainments; all supply food to pamper the insatiable appetite of pride. Between the passion and its stimulus there is a constant reaction. Pride is flattered and encouraged by a real or fancied superiority; and it is pride, which prompts us to the exertions, by which that superiority is to be attained.

4thly. A principle, so extensive in its operation and derived withal from such an origin, cannot but be powerful in its effects; nor can those effects be otherwise than of a malignant and noxious character. Proud of their several

accomplishments, the strong oppresses the weak, the beautiful disdains the homely, the learned derides the ignorant, the rich and powerful trample on the humble and the poor ; while he, who has made an imaginary progress in spiritual improvement, looks scornfully on him whom he esteems his less favoured brother, and puts him away, with “Stand aside ; come not near me ; for I am holier than thou.” Look abroad into the world ; examine the intercourse between man and man ; trace the causes of evils, which disturb the harmony, and most powerfully contribute to the misery, of society ; see whence arise schisms in the church, and rebellions in the state : and among all “the lusts which war in the members” of men, and give rise to “the wars and fightings among them,” what more abundant, what more pestilential source is there than pride ? Pride first brought sin and misery into the world : and pride is one of the keenest incentives of all the evils, whether public or private, national or domestic, ecclesiastical or civil, which are now disseminated through it.

5thly. That such and so noxious a quality should be pleasing to Almighty God, it were foolish and impious to suppose. Prejudicial as it hath proved itself to his glory, by introducing disobedience and unhappiness among the works of his hands, it cannot but be displeasing in his

sight. That it is so, the word of God himself assures us. Of this quality we are told, as of other worldly principles, that "it is not of the Father," that it is hateful in the sight of God; and that it is the forerunner of destruction: of those, who are actuated by this quality, it is told us, elsewhere as well as in the text expressly, that "God resisteth the proud;" that he "will destroy the house of the proud;" that "he that exalteth himself, shall be abased;" that "every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord ¹."

How should it be otherwise? One of the distinguishing marks of those times of heathen depravity, when "men did not like to retain God in their knowledge," was pride². One of the distinguishing marks of that apostasy from truth, of which the apostle prophesied, that "in the last days perilous times should come," is pride³. Pride is the most appropriate characteristic of that "man of sin, the son of perdition;" whom the apostle again foresaw in the spirit, as "opposing and exalting himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped: so that he as God, sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God ⁴." It is of the very essence

¹ Prov. xvi. 5.

² Rom. i. 28. 30.

³ 2 Tim. iii. 1, 2.

⁴ 2 Thess. ii. 4.

of this hateful quality, to be estranged from the knowledge, to be at enmity with the glory, of the living God ; how then can we suppose but that God must hate and abhor it ?

II. From thus considering the character of pride, let us return to the more pleasing view of its opposite, humility : and see how in the various particulars, to which our attention has been now directed, the deformity of the one is contrasted by the loveliness of the other.

First, therefore, let it be remarked, that as pride cast Satan and his angels out of heaven, so it was humility, which, by keeping the blessed spirits in their allegiance to the Almighty, kept them also in possession of their heavenly abodes. Superior as they are to other created beings, and excelling in strength, they are for nothing so much distinguished by the holy Scriptures, as for their dutiful submission to and performance of the divine will. “ They do the commandments of the Lord ; ” they “ hearken unto the voice of his word : ” they “ are his ministers to do his pleasure¹ : ” the alacrity and perfectness with which they do the will of “ our Father which is in heaven,” are set before us by our Saviour as models for our conduct upon earth². Nor can a brighter instance of humility in a created being

¹ Psalm ciii. 21.

² Matt. vi. 10.

be proposed for our admiration than that, which the beloved disciple beheld in the spirit, when the blessed inhabitants of heaven, in token of the most devout and lowly adoration of the Lord God Almighty, “fell down before him that sat on the throne, and worshipped him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne¹.”

2dly. Did pride occasion the fall of man? It was humility, which reinstated him in God’s favour: humility, beyond all conception great; for what idea can be formed by man equal to that, which was exhibited in the person of Him, “who being in the form of God thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross².” God manifest in the flesh and made man: He who made the world, submitting to be imprisoned in the womb of an earthly mother, and to be clothed with perishable flesh; the Lord of all things demeaning himself to the condition of a servant; the Judge of the world suffering an agonising, an ignominious, a servile, an accursed death: O

¹ Rev. iv. 10.

² Phil. ii. 8.

what a mystery of humility for the angels to desire to look into ! O what a lesson to fill us with shame of face and lowliness of heart ; us, proud, weak, and sinful men !

3dly. When pride had gained a conquest over the allegiance of our first parents, did it continue to reign in their descendants, a most powerful motive in actuating the worldly man ? Opposed to this prevailing principle in the child of the wicked one, is that which actuates the faithful and consistent follower of Christ. Redeemed from sin and death by the infinite condescension of the Son of God, the disciple of the meek and lowly Jesus, the worshipper of a crucified Saviour, is well convinced that pride was not made for man, much less for a Christian man ; but that humility is the very badge of his profession. All those dispositions, which his Redeemer and Master hath marked with especial approbation, and hath made essential to the spirit of Christianity, are inseparably interwoven with humility. Without humility, where is the love of God, which cannot exist distinct from a dutiful submission to his commandments ? Without humility, where is the love of man, that love which consists in the cultivation of charitable affections, in the exercise of charitable services, from one towards another ? Without humility, where is poverty of spirit and contrition of soul ? where are

meekness and mercy? where is purity of heart? where are peace and righteousness? where is repentance for sin, and faith, exclusive of every meritorious claim, faith in the blood of the Redeemer?

It was an emphatical expression, and one which comprehended within itself a wide range of Christian duty, when the apostle Paul spoke to the Ephesian church of “serving the Lord with all humility of mind¹.” A proud Christian is a contradiction in terms; humility is of the very essence of the Gospel.

4thly. Does pride abound in consequences, injurious to the well-being of society? What more effectual remedy than humility, to heal the wounds, occasioned by an arrogant and imperious temper? Would men conform to the directions of the Gospel, and in the true spirit of Christian lowliness would “each esteem other better than himself,” how would brother accord with brother, and man with man; how would brethren dwell together in unity, and Christians take sweet counsel together, and walk in the house of God as friends; how would nation cease to rise up against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; whilst mutual forbearance should pave the way for mutual and universal harmony, and

¹ Acts xx. 19.

peace should flourish out of the earth, and righteousness should look down from heaven ! First the pride of the devil, and then the pride of man, rendered a Redeemer necessary for the salvation of the world. He came, and wrought salvation by humility ; and left a lesson to be learned by his disciples. O might the example be copied ! O might the precept be observed by those who call themselves by the name of Christ ! the angelic hymn should then be realized by the promotion of “ God’s glory in the highest, of peace on earth, of good will among men.”

Lastly, Is pride hateful in the sight of God ? what is more pleasing to him than humility ? “ He resisteth the proud ; but he giveth grace to the humble.” Infinitely as he is exalted above the things of earth, and incapable of being contained by the heaven and heaven of heavens, he vouchsafes to visit the lowly man with his especial favour, and to choose him for his peculiar dwelling-place. “ For thus saith the High and Lofty One, that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy ; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones¹.” “ Before honour,” saith the wise king, “ is humility.” And what

¹ Isaiah lvii. 15.

honour is to be compared with that, which is attributed to the humble man, to have the Lord continually nigh unto him, to be watched over by the Most Highest, to be blessed with special visitations of grace and mercy from above !

And now, my brethren, having set before you two opposite qualities, not perhaps in the colours, in which mankind in general survey them, but in those, which I apprehend are given to them by the Scriptures of truth, I here leave them for your consideration. It is for you, for each and all of you, to choose between that quality, which cast the devil and his angels into hell, and that, which hath preserved the angels of God in heaven ; between that which wrought the disobedience of Adam, and that which was perfected in the sacrifice of Christ ; between that which still reigns in the children of disobedience, the servants of the devil, and that which distinguishes the faithful follower of the meek and lowly Jesus ; between that which propagates dissensions and misery among mankind, and that which for dissension and misery introduces happiness and peace ; between that which is rejected by the Almighty with abhorrence, and that which is fostered by him with distinguished love.

If these things be true, and the word of God teaches me to believe that they are so, no man, at least no reasonable man, can hesitate in his

choice. It is in fact equivalent with the choice, which Moses by command of God proposed to the Israelites, “Behold, I set before you this day good and evil, life and death, a blessing and a curse.” Be ye therefore clothed with humility, my brethren. “Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God : and be ye all subject one to another.” Let humility towards God prompt you to fear God and to keep his commandments with unqualified obedience ; to pray to him, to praise him, and to thank him for all his blessings ; to put your trust in his mercy for salvation through the precious blood-shedding of his Son : to rely for grace to serve and please him on the sanctifying influence of his Holy Spirit. Let your humility towards each other prompt you to “love as brethren :” “in lowliness of mind each to esteem other better than himself :” to “forbear one another in love :” to “endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” Copy, in a word, the humility of your Saviour ; and be encouraged and supported by the hope of receiving some measure of his reward. For the exceeding great humility, which he manifested in taking upon himself the human nature and suffering therein for the sins of men, “God highly exalted him” in the same nature, “and gave him a name which is above every name ;” and of those, who follow after his great humility, we are

infallibly assured, that God will visit them with his favour here, and make them partakers of his exaltation hereafter.

Almighty and everlasting God, who, of thy tender love towards mankind, hast sent thy Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ, to take upon him our flesh and to suffer death upon the cross, that all mankind should follow the example of his great humility: Mercifully grant, that we may both follow the example of his patience, and also be made partakers of his resurrection, through the same Jesus Christ our Lord: To whom with Thee and the Holy Ghost be all honour and glory for ever. Amen.

SERMON XLII.

ON SPIRITUAL PRIDE.

LUKE vi. 41, 42.

Why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but perceivest not the beam that is in thine own eye ?

Either how canst thou say to thy brother, Brother, let me pull out the mote that is in thine eye, when thou thyself beholdest not the beam that is in thine own eye ? Thou hypocrite—

THE character of our blessed Lord was distinguished for its mildness and gentleness ; and the reproofs, which he directed against the sinner, generally partook of these his characteristic qualities. There was however a particular order of men amongst the Jews, in his censures of whom he appears to have departed from this general spirit of forbearance, and to have condemned them with unmixed severity of manner and of language. In his conduct towards other persons he mingled mercy with justice ; he did “ not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax :” but upon the Pharisees he poured

out the vials of his hottest displeasure and indignation. He called them, as his messenger had done before, “serpents and a generation of vipers¹”; he charged them with folly and voluntary blindness, with outward purity and inward pollution²: he denounced upon them woe, incurable and reiterated woe³: he threatened them with the damnation of hell⁴.

Now for such appellations and such a sentence as these to be drawn from the merciful lips of the meek and lowly Jesus, there must have been some extraordinary and urgent occasion. The Pharisees must have been unusually depraved. Their sin must have been of a very heinous character. And yet the Pharisees were “of the very straitest sect of the Jewish religion.” They valued themselves upon their descent from Abraham, the father of the faithful, and upon their rigid and punctual observance of the law. They were diligent in the practice of ceremonial righteousness. They were remarkable for the decency of their outward behaviour. They avoided those moral delinquencies, which are for the most part of evil report, “adultery, injustice, extortion:” nay, it should have seemed that their conduct was regulated by a religious principle, for they thanked

¹ Matt. xxiii. 33.

² Matt. xxiii. 27.

³ Matt. xxiii. 13—29.

⁴ Matt. xxiii. 33.

God for the possession of superior sanctity. The fact however was, that all this conduct, for which the Pharisees valued themselves, was the very sin which rendered them offensive in the eyes of God. The motive of their behaviour was not a religious, but a worldly and selfish principle; not a love of God, but a love of themselves; in one word, it was pride; pride of the worst sort, spiritual pride: pride, the principal features of which are delineated in the words of our Saviour in the text: pride, which exercises itself in an hypocritical assumption of superior sanctity, to which it has no real pretensions; in a voluntary and resolute blindness to the sins, of which itself is guilty; and in an uncharitable propensity to discover, to proclaim, and to magnify, the faults of others. There were various particulars in the practice of these self-righteous religionists, which our Saviour at several times made the subject of his censures: but this hateful and noxious quality, pride, appears to have been at the bottom of them all, and to have diffused its leaven as it were through the lump, and to have mingled itself with all their actions.

The sinful character of the Pharisees, and the woe denounced upon them by Christ, are recorded for our instruction. And with reason. Pride is natural to the human heart: it is a seducing and dangerous quality in its various forms;

but in no one so dangerous as in the form of spiritual pride. It soothes and flatters the weakness of our deceitful hearts, to think that we, like the Pharisees, are regarded with signal and exclusive favour by the Almighty ; that we, like them, are invested with extraordinary holiness, and exempted from the commission of sins, to which our brethren are prone : and it is therefore no uncommon sight to behold the professors of a religion, of which the singular distinction is humility of heart, priding themselves upon an assumed character for superior sanctity ;—" perceiving not the beam that is in their own eye," resolutely blind to their own besetting sins ;—but at the same time eager to " pull out the mote that is in their brother's eye," closely scrutinizing and condemning the faults of others. Of such a spirit the *danger* must appear, from the conduct of our Saviour towards those of his own brethren after the flesh, who were actuated by it. Let us direct our thoughts at present to its *sinfulness*, and to its inconsistency with the character recommended to the Christian, under the three several features, under which the text offers it to our notice.

1. The first point of view, in which spiritual pride demands our attention, is its *hypocritical* assumption of superior sanctity, to which it has no real pretensions.

The word “hypocrite,” which is of Greek extraction, in its primary signification means one, who personates a character that is not his own; for instance, like an actor in a play. In a religious sense therefore we understand by it one, who counterfeits a character for piety and virtue, which does not belong to him. The hypocrite is (if I may so express myself) a practical liar. The liar is guilty of falsehood by his mouth; the hypocrite by his conduct: the liar speaks falsehood, the hypocrite acts it. The main difference between the two appears to be, that, whereas the liar may with occasional falsehood unite a certain portion of truth, the whole life of the hypocrite must be systematically a tissue of delusion and deceit. Of such a property as hypocrisy it were unnecessary to speak at length, in order to shew its sinfulness in the eyes of God, and its inconsistency with the character of a disciple of Christ. If truth be an attribute of God¹, hypocrisy, which is throughout at variance with truth, must be hateful to him. If God abhorreth a lie², he must abhor hypocrisy, of which lying is the very essence and constituent principle. If for this cause Christ was born and came into the world, that he might bear witness unto the truth³, how can hypocrisy,

¹ Deut. xxxii. 4.² Prov. xii. 22.³ John xviii. 37.

which is at irreconcilable enmity with truth, be compatible with his Gospel? If it be the duty of his disciples to have their conversation in the world and towards each other in simplicity and godly sincerity¹, how can the habitual dissembler have any station among his followers? If whosoever loveth and maketh a lie is to be shut out of Christ's heavenly kingdom, and to have his part in the lake, which burneth with fire and brimstone², what hope of escaping that "second death" can be entertained by him, who hath clothed himself with deceit as with a raiment; to whom falsehood is as the cloke that is upon him, and as the girdle that he is always girded withal?

2. Let us proceed to a second feature of spiritual pride, exhibited in the text, consisting in a voluntary and resolute blindness to the sins, of which itself is guilty. "Why perceivest thou not the beam, that is in thine own eye?"

"Lord, I thank thee that I am not as other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers: I fast twice in the week: I give tithes of all that I possess." Such is the language of self-conceit, of self-righteousness. Such is the language now, as it was heretofore, of him who is a Pharisee in spirit. He avoids those more prominent

¹ 2 Cor. i. 12.

² Rev. xxi. 8; xxii. 15.

crimes, which obtrude themselves upon the public eye, and reflect disgrace on those who commit them ; but does he also pray and strive to be cleansed from secret faults, to be “ kept back from presumptuous sins, lest they get the dominion over him ?” He practises those ceremonial observances, which it were unlawful to omit ; but is he equally diligent in executing “ the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith ?” In the discharge of his religious duties does he “ worship God in spirit and in truth ?” in the exercise of brotherly love towards his neighbour, does he endeavour to be “ perfect even as his Father which is in heaven is perfect ?” in the control of his appetites and passions, does he “ purify himself even as God is pure ?” To prosecute the enquiry no farther than the very words, with which the Pharisee in the parable is represented as appearing before the Lord, is there no arrogance, no presumption in the affected humility, with which he thanks the Lord for his superior sanctity ? Is there no uncharitableness in the comparison which he institutes between himself and other men ? Is there no reliance upon his own worthiness, no ostentatious display of his own goodness, in the declaration which he makes of his performance of religious offices ? These were the parts of his character, to which the Pharisee in the parable, who is held up to

us as an example of the Pharisaical spirit, wherever and whenever it is found, ought to have directed his attention : these were “the beam in his own eye,” which he, and which others of the same spirit, ought to consider, but are altogether unwilling to perceive.

This voluntary blindness to our own faults is sinful in God’s sight, and is especially unworthy of a follower of Christ. It is required of us to “commune with our own hearts,” and to become acquainted with the deceitfulness and wickedness of them, in order that with all lowliness and prostration of soul we may bewail our own wretchedness ; that we may acknowledge and feel the necessity of a Redeemer ; that we may be (as far as it be possible) duly sensible of the infinite mercy of God in sending his Son for our redemption ; and that we may pray and labour fervently, that our hearts may be cleansed and renewed under the sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit of God. But such a sense of our own helplessness and misery, and of the mercy of God in Christ ; such humility and devout gratitude ; such repentance and sanctification, cannot be attained, unless we be well convinced of the hereditary corruption of our nature, and of our own actual sins : nay, on the other hand, by fixing our thoughts on what we fancy to be the better parts of our character, which it is natural

for us to do, when they are thus diverted from the worse, we are supplying materials for that vain-glorious disposition, which we derive by natural descent from Adam, and are raising additional impediments in the way of that humility and poorness of spirit, which becomes us as followers of Christ.

3. But thirdly, it is not only by shutting our eyes to the sins of our own hearts and lives, that the disposition passing under our review betrays itself: blind as it is in this respect, it is no less distinguished for its clear-sightedness in another. Like “the moles and the bats” in discerning its own sinfulness, it has the keenness of an eagle’s eye in penetrating into the faults of its neighbours.

“Why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother’s eye, but perceivest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Either how canst thou say to thy brother, Brother, let me pull out the mote that is in thine eye, when thou thyself beholdest not the beam that is in thine own eye?” The question is in the words of our Saviour. Do we require its answer? One will serve for each part of the demand. Both our blindness in one case, and our sharp-sightedness in the other, proceed from the same cause, the sinfulness of our nature, and its consequent disinclination to accommodate itself to the laws of Christ.

“ Why perceivest thou not the beam that is in thine own eye ?” Pride is the fatal cause : pride, which thinks too highly of itself, and will not suffer us to allow, that we are depraved and sinful creatures. “ Why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother’s eye ?” Still pride is the cause ; pride, which as it thinks too highly of itself, thinks also too lowly and contemptuously of others :—which, as it forbids us to see our own depravity and sinfulness, magnifies at the same time the faults, probably the less heinous faults, of others : I say, probably the less heinous faults of others, for such appears to be the intention of our blessed Lord in the opposition which he has introduced between the *beam* in our own eye, and the *mote* in our brother’s ; and such appears also to be the purport of various declarations in the word of God, which, whatever sentence it may pass upon other instances of human corruption, expressly marks out the proud man as the object of God’s resistance ¹.

It is probably for this reason, namely, because so hateful and noxious a principle as pride is the foundation, that a censorious spirit, a disposition to cull out and enlarge upon the follies and vices of other men, is so severely reprehended in holy Scripture, and especially declared so much at

¹ James iv. 6.

enmity with the Christian spirit. Of that spirit one of the most prominent qualities, I believe our Saviour's words will be my warrant in saying, that the most distinguishing quality, is charity or brotherly love : charity, of which the apostle says, that, as on the one hand " it vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up " by a contemplation of its own excellence, so on the other hand " it doth not behave itself unseemly " by disparaging the characters of others, but " believeth all things, hopeth all things " in their favour. As children of a merciful Father, as professors of a gospel of love, charity in all its various bearings and departments, and among the rest in thinking and speaking favourably of our brethren, is enjoined upon us : and all uncharitableness, of which a censorious disposition is a principal ingredient, is as expressly forbidden : and, that the commandments of God may not be without the sanction of his promises and threatenings to enforce them, we are warned to " judge not, and we shall not be judged ; " to " condemn not, and we shall not be condemned. "

It remains, that a brief application be now made of the remarks which have been laid before you, by an appeal to the consciences of you, my brethren, upon the subject. Ask your hearts then, and ask them with faithfulness and sincerity, whether you are clear of the offences, that

have been now examined ; offences, so much the more to be dreaded, as they are so flattering to the weakness and vanity of man. Does no hypocrisy, no acting of a character which does not really belong to you, enter into your performance of the offices of religion ? Are you satisfied with the outward appearance of devotion, instead of being sanctified inwardly in your hearts ? Do you worship God not with your lips only, but in your lives ; not only with the ceremonies of religion, but in spirit and in truth ? Do you cultivate the spirit of godliness, as well as observe its forms ?

How are you with respect to your own consciousness of sin ? Do you “ perceive not the beam that is in your own eye ? ” Are you blind to your manifold offences ? or do you humbly and contritely acknowledge, that, whatever wickedness by the grace of God you may be enabled to avoid, still you have followed too much the devices and desires of your own heart, you have offended against God’s holy laws, you have left undone those things which you ought to have done, you have done those things which you ought not to have done, and that there is no health in you ? How are you with respect to your brother ? Are you quicksighted in “ perceiving the mote that is in his eye ; ” in prying into his faults, inferior perhaps to your own of-

fences, in magnifying them, and bringing them out to notice? or do you tenderly throw over them the veil of Christian charity, and mete them with that measure, which you would wish to be measured with yourself? My brethren, as you value the blessing of God, your characters as followers of Christ, and your own salvation, refrain from that Pharisaical spirit, which signally displays itself in a sanctified hypocrisy, in a conceited admiration of its own righteousness, and in censorious reflections upon others. Be holy; be humble; be charitable. Such dispositions are the most infallible stamp of a true follower of Christ on earth; and by such must we be qualified to be admitted into his presence, and to be made partakers of his joy in heaven.

SERMON XLIII.

THE DUTY AND BENEFITS OF LIVING AFTER THE SPIRIT.

ROMANS viii. 12, 13.

Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh ;

For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die ; but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.

It was ordained by Almighty God at the creation, that the holiness and happiness of man should be inseparable. When man ceased to be holy, he ceased also to be happy. In the remedy provided for the loss of happiness through the sacrifice of Christ, the same order prevails as that which was established by God at the creation. As death entered into the world, and became the inheritance of mankind, through sin ; so also they are to be introduced to everlasting life, and to its concomitant unfailing happiness, through holiness of life. In order that we may be happy hereafter, we must be holy in this world.

This truth is fully laid down, and earnestly insisted upon, by St. Paul in his Epistle to the Romans ; and, amongst other passages, in the one just recited : wherein having noticed the operation of that Spirit, which raised up Christ from the dead, and his blessed influence on the present and future welfare of Christ's faithful followers, he draws from the consideration a natural and very important inference. " Therefore, brethren," that is, by reason of the blessings, which we now enjoy, and which are promised to us in future, from the Spirit of God, " we are debtors not to the flesh, to live after the flesh ; for, if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die ; but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live."

The passage distributes itself into five several heads, upon each of which I propose to insist. May that Holy Spirit, who sanctifieth us and all the elect people of God, assist our meditations, enlighten our understandings, and guide us into the truth, whilst we proceed with the subject ; and consider, 1st, the duty, which by the mouth of the apostle he declares to belong to us ; 2dly, the benefits, to be derived from a performance of it ; 3dly, the particulars of the duty ; 4thly, by what agency it is to be performed ; and lastly, who are the persons, to whom his exhortation applies.

1. First, then ; the apostle declares that we have a duty to perform. “Brethren, we are debtors.”

The notion of a duty cannot be more plainly or forcibly expressed than under the figure of a debt ; which implies the strongest obligation on the part of him, who owes it, and the strongest claim on the part of him, to whom it is owen. Whether incurred for benefits received, or by voluntary contract, a debt both in law and in conscience places the debtor in the hands of his creditor ; deprives him, in that particular, of all freedom of will and action ; and imposes on him the obligation of complying with his creditor’s demands. It is this submission of our own wills, and this conformity of our conduct, to the inclinations and injunctions of another, which the apostle seems to impress, when, speaking of our spiritual condition, he declares, that “we are debtors.”

Taking it for granted, at present, that we are in the state which he describes, namely, that “we are debtors :” who or what is that, which has a claim upon our attention ? To whom or to what are we in debt ? Are we debtors to the flesh ? Are we bound to comply with its will, to satisfy its demands ? Have we received from it such benefits, that it is entitled to our services in return ? or have we made a covenant with it, so

as to have contracted for a voluntary obedience? In one sense indeed we are debtors to the flesh: we are indebted to our mortal bodies, as means and instruments of our present existence; and as such we owe them in return meat and clothing, nourishment and provision. But considered, as the apostle means it to be considered, in a spiritual sense, as the seat of violent affections and sinful lusts, what is that claim, which the flesh can advance against us? If we endeavour to satisfy its demands, (for satisfy them altogether we never can, inasmuch as, the more it is pampered, it craves the more,) if we endeavour to comply with its will, and make ourselves its servants and its slaves, and let it “reign in our mortal bodies to obey it in the lusts thereof,” will it procure us present peace and happiness? “Whence then come wars and fightings among us? Come they not hence, even of our lusts that war in our members¹?”—Will it ensure us future felicity? Why then saith the Scripture, that “to be carnally minded is death²?”—Have we entered into a bond to obey it? What then becomes of that solemn vow, promise, and profession, which we made at our baptism, that we would “renounce the devil and all his works, the pomps and vanity of this wicked world, and

¹ Jam. iv. 1.

² Rom. viii. 6.

all the sinful lusts of the flesh?" No, my brethren : whatever other claim may be established to our obedience, the inordinate desires of a corrupt nature have not a syllable to plead in their behalf. They bind us by no benefit already conferred ; they bind us by no assurance of any good in reversion ; they bind us by no contract. They have no claim upon us : we owe them nothing : whatever be our debts, " we are debtors not unto the flesh."

To what then are we debtors? For that we are such to some just and legitimate claimant, is what the apostle asserts, and what we of course cannot but allow. We need not look far for that claimant ; since the argument of the same apostle necessarily implies that we are debtors to the Spirit. " Therefore, brethren," says he, " we are debtors : " *therefore*, that is, by reason of the blessings which we enjoy from the Spirit : the Spirit of course is he to whom we are indebted.

The blessings, which the true Christian enjoys from the Holy Spirit, are manifold ; the apostle in the context is contented to specify two, which are the most comprehensive, and to which therefore it may be sufficient that we principally direct our thoughts. First, " The Spirit dwelleth in us : " the body of every true believer is the living temple of the Spirit : he sheds upon us his graces ; he regenerates, sanctifies, renews,

refreshes, enlightens, strengthens, comforts us : therefore we are debtors unto Him. Secondly, as the Spirit now dwelleth in us, so also, “ will he quicken our mortal bodies, and raise them from the dead.” He fills us at present with joy and peace in believing ; he will conduct us hereafter to happiness : he now bestows upon us his graces ; he will hereafter crown us with glory : therefore also we are debtors unto Him. Let us not omit one other reason, which establishes the claim of the Holy Spirit to our obedience, and which should convince us that it is our indispensable duty to submit ourselves entirely unto Him. We promised him obedience at our baptism : in consideration of that promise we were baptized into his name, and made clean in the laver of spiritual regeneration : so that when all the blessings, which we receive from the Spirit as claims upon our obedience, are enumerated, this other consideration is to be added to the number, that we have voluntarily, considerately, and solemnly contracted for its payment : unless indeed we renounce the obligation, and therewithal the benefits, of our baptismal vow.

2. The debt, which the apostle states us to owe, thus appearing due not to the flesh but to the Spirit, it is secondly to be observed, that, according to the kind and bountiful ordinance of God’s providence, our interest coincides with our

duty. If we were to consider ourselves debtors to the flesh, and if, agreeably to that supposition, we were to “live after the flesh, we should die;” if, on the contrary, being well persuaded to whom our obedience is due, we live after the Spirit, or (as it is expressed in the text) “do mortify the deeds of the body, we shall live.” You see then that by withholding our allegiance from that quarter, where it is not due, and by paying it where it is due, we derive a twofold benefit. We avoid an evil and we gain a positive good. The case may be illustrated by a comparison drawn from earthly things. Suppose a person strongly tempted to revolt from his legitimate sovereign, and to take part with a faction in avowed opposition to his prince. If he suffer himself to be drawn away from his duty, he is threatened with an ignominious and painful punishment: if he remain steady to the cause of his rightful governor, he is promised a glorious and invaluable reward. Such are the motives, which the Holy Spirit of God holds forth to retain us in our allegiance; evils, to deter us from attaching ourselves to his enemy; blessings, to encourage us in being steadfast unto him. A sense of duty indeed in the abstract were the soundest and most unexceptionable motive to induce us to do what is required of us. But we are fallen creatures;

and as such, weak, wavering, and irresolute. Our merciful Father therefore, who thoroughly knows our infirmities, condescends also to pity and assist them. Not satisfied with clearly revealing to us our duty, he as clearly assures us that it is our interest to perform it. He points out to us the path of disobedience, and he at the same time warns us, that it will infallibly convey us away from heaven, and from his presence; that it is the way to hell, and goeth down to the chambers of death, everlasting death. He places before us the way to holiness, and at the same time stimulates us to pursue it by assuring us that it will lead to him, in whose presence there is fulness of joy, and at whose right hand there are pleasures for evermore. He tells us explicitly, “that to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace¹:” —that “he that soweth to his flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting²;” —that “if we live unto the flesh we shall die, but if we through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, we shall live.”

3. And so we proceed to consider, 3dly, the particulars of that duty, wherein we are debtors to the Holy Spirit.

¹ Rom. viii. 6.

² Gal. vi. 8.

And, 1st, it is indispensably necessary that we do not live after the flesh. Now “to live after the flesh,” is to take for our rule of conduct such principles as men of carnal minds approve; maxims of mere worldly prudence, honour, custom, convenience, expediency, and the like: —“to live after the flesh,” is to regard the gratification of our sensual appetites as the end and scope of our existence, as if we were sent into the world to “eat and drink, for to-morrow we die,” like brute beasts which have no understanding: —“to live after the flesh,” is, in conformity with such principles and in furtherance of such an end, to indulge in “the works of the flesh.” As to what they are, it were needless to dwell upon them in detail; “the works of the flesh are manifest,” saith the apostle to the Galatians, “which are these; adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like¹.” After this manner then we must *not* live; such principles as these we must *not* adopt; to such an end as this we must *not* direct our sight; such things as these we must *not* do. But on the contrary we must “mortify the deeds of the body;” we must not

¹ Gal. v. 19—21.

only resist sin, but we must conquer it ; we must not only subdue it for a time or a season, but we must be habitually and systematically victors over it ; we must not only retrench it here and there, but we must make it our aim to lay the axe to the root of the tree, to destroy and exterminate it, to leave of it neither root nor branch.

The text indeed specifies only the *deeds* of the body, because it is by the outward deeds that the inward man discloses himself. But the mortification, of which it speaks, must take place in the inward, as well as in the outward, man. “The inside of the cup and platter must be cleansed, that the outside of them may be clean also¹.” The source must be rendered pure, that the stream may not be polluted. “From within, out of the heart of man, proceed all those evil things which defile a man².” And not only must the excrescences be cut off, but the strength and core of the disease, which rankles in the heart, and spreads corruption over the body, must be extirpated, or the mortification of sin can never be complete.

Thus “mortifying the deeds of the body,” we must “live unto the Spirit :” we must take for our rule of action such principles as he recommends, especially love for God, and love for our

¹ Matt. xxiii. 25.

² Mark vii. 15.

neighbour founded upon love for God ; we must consider the end of our existence to be, what he describes it, the glory of God, and the salvation of souls, of the souls of others, as well as of our own ; we must be fruitful in those qualities which he infuses, in “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.” This is to “live not unto the flesh, but unto the Spirit :” this is to be not carnally, but spiritually minded : this is to be led by the Spirit, and to have the Spirit dwelling in us : this is to have the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.

4. Fourthly, it is to be considered who are the agents in this work of mortifying the deeds of the body ; and the apostle instructs us that they are two : “If ye, through the Spirit, do mortify the deeds of the body.” The primary and principal agent is the Holy Spirit ; an inferior and secondary one, but still a necessary agent, is the Christian himself.

Without the Spirit, we can do nothing towards the attainment of holiness : of ourselves indeed we can live unto the flesh, and, if we be left to follow the bent of our own sinful nature, we must so live. “Original sin (as our Article declares) is the fault and corruption of the nature of every man, that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam, whereby man is very far gone from

original righteousness, and is of his own nature inclined to evil, so that the flesh lusteth always contrary to the Spirit; and this infection of nature doth remain, yea in them that are regenerated," or born anew by baptism, of water and the Holy Spirit; so that even in them "the lust of the flesh is not subject to the law of God." Of ourselves then, we are still prone to sin: "of ourselves we are not sufficient to think" or do "any good thing as of ourselves, but our sufficiency is of God," without whom we can do nothing.

Then again as we *can* do nothing without him, he *will* do nothing without us. Nay, as it was said of Christ, that he could do no mighty work at Nazareth, because of the unbelief of the people, so it may be said of the Spirit, that, agreeably to the ordinary dispensation of his grace, and to the laws by which he chooses to act in the moral government of the universe, he *can* do nothing without us. He works in us and with us, and we must work with him. Not that the power of working with him is of our own natural ability: He is the author and giver of it: but, having once bestowed it upon us of his free grace, he requires that we exert it in co-operation, with him. Thus, when the apostle instructs the Philippians, that "it is God which worketh in them both to will and to do of his good

pleasure¹," he does not employ the doctrine as a licence for indolence, or a ground of believing that the Holy Spirit would do all that was necessary for their salvation without their own exertions, but he applies it as an incentive for stimulating them to "work out their own salvation with fear and trembling:" and thus the same Holy Spirit, which directed the Psalmist to call upon God, to "create in him a clean heart, and to renew a right spirit within him²," directed his people also by the mouth of his prophet, to "cast away from them all their transgressions, and to make them a new heart and a new spirit³." This doctrine of our own endeavours co-operating with the influence of the Spirit; of his being the primary agent, and of our working with and in subserviency to him, is well expressed by our Church in one of her collects, wherein we are taught to beseech Almighty God, that "as by his special grace preventing us, he doth put into our minds good desires, so by his continual help we may bring the same to good effect."

5. Having thus far considered the *duty* of "living not unto the flesh but unto the Spirit;" the *benefits*, which result from a performance of it; the leading *particulars*, of which it consists;

¹ Phil. ii. 13.

² Ps. li. 10.

³ Ezek. xviii. 31.

and the *agents*, by whom it is to be performed ; it remains that we make a brief application of the whole, by remarking, in the 5th and last place, upon the *persons*, to whom the exhortation of the apostle was addressed.

It was addressed, in common with the rest of the epistle, which contains it, to “all” the brethren of St. Paul in Rome, “beloved of God, called to be saints¹ :” in other words, to the whole Christian church or society at Rome ; for it is notoriously the fact, that, under such appellations as that of “saints” and the like, it was the practice with the apostles, and those Christians who lived in and near the apostolical times, to speak of all such, as had taken upon them the profession of the Gospel, and had been baptized in the name of Christ, and bound themselves to holiness of life ; although it could hardly be doubted, that hypocrites were therein mingled with the faithful, according to the parable of our Saviour, who likened “the kingdom of heaven to a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind².”

The advice, thus addressed to *all* members of the church at Rome, of whatever description, was doubtless intended for the benefit of *all* ; and it is transmitted to us, that it may in like manner be

¹ Chap. i. 7.

² Matt. xiii. 47.

considered as addressed to all the members of Christ's visible church, to all professors of Christianity, or, in apostolical language, to "all such as are called to be saints." To those who are really zealous in the cause of religion, and holy in life and conversation, it is an encouragement to persevere in well-doing, and a caution to "take heed lest they fall:" to those, who are Christians rather by profession than in sincerity, and who are little careful to "live worthy of the vocation wherewith they be called," it is a memorial, that it will be of no avail to them "to name the name of Christ," unless they depart from iniquity; that "not every one who saith unto him Lord, Lord," who merely professes himself his disciple, "shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of his Father which is in heaven." And generally it is an admonition to us all to be upon our guard against the seductions of the flesh, which we are naturally prone to follow; and to keep ourselves pure from all voluntary pollution, that the Holy Spirit of God may delight to dwell in us as his temple, and to hold communion with our souls. This if we do, we possess the most infallible evidence which we can have in this world, that "the Spirit of him, who raised up Jesus from the dead, dwelleth in us, and that he who raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken our mortal bodies by his Spirit that

dwelleth in us.” In fact the only criterion, by which the word of God authorizes us to judge of our future prospects, is by an examination of our present state : for there is no doctrine more plainly revealed, or more frequently repeated, or more strongly inculcated in Scripture than this, that “if we live unto the flesh, we shall die ; but if we through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, and have our fruit unto holiness, the end of our labours shall be everlasting life.”

Lord, we beseech thee, grant thy people grace to withstand the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil ; and with pure hearts and minds to follow thee the only God ; through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

S E R M O N XLIV.

THE HUMILIATION OF AHAB AN ENCOURAGEMENT TO REPENTANCE.

1 KINGS xxi. 27—29.

And it came to pass when Ahab heard those words, that he rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his flesh, and fasted, and lay in sackcloth, and went softly.

And the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, Seest thou how Ahab humbleth himself before me? because he humbleth himself before me, I will not bring the evil in his days; but in his son's days will I bring the evil upon his house.

GREAT and manifold as are the blessings, for which we are indebted to the revelation of his will, that it hath pleased Almighty God to make known to us, there is none more deserving of our gratitude than the assurance, which he hath graciously given to the sinner, of his determination to pardon and absolve the sins of those, who in hearty repentance forsake their sins, and return to their obedience unto him.

Upon this subject, interesting as it cannot but

be to every reflecting mind, human reason, unassisted by the dayspring from above, is capable of giving us but little comfort. No information, which it can supply, will lead us to be convinced, that there is with God forgiveness for the sins of men. It may indeed by means of the various evidences of his attributes, which are dispersed over the works of creation, persuade us, that God is good and merciful : but it cannot give us any satisfactory assurance, that the pardon of sin is consistent with his holiness and justice. And therefore it is, that in every manifestation of his pleasure, which he hath made to man, an express assurance of his willingness to pardon the repentant sinner hath made a part of the revelation.

From the period, when the sentence was first pronounced upon disobedience in the person of Adam, to that, when in the fulness of time the grant of forgiveness was sealed by the acceptance of the atonement of Christ, the dayspring from on high has never visited the earth, but that it has been distinguished by promises of peace. Even when the Almighty has conspicuously interfered in the moral government of the world for the purposes of judgment, the proffer of mercy and pardon upon repentance hath not been omitted. As it was in the days of Noah, so has it been in subsequent generations. When

God hath brought a cloud over the earth, the token of the covenant of mercy hath been seen in the cloud.

More manifestly indeed have his purposes of reconciliation been made known by the Gospel of Christ, which not only more distinctly reveals the will of God in the conversion of sinners and their consequent admission into his favour, but discloses also with a degree of clearness, to which no former dispensation could lay claim, the grounds, whereon the divine will is founded ; namely, the atonement, that has been made for human disobedience, the wages, that have been paid to the sin of Adam and his posterity, in the obedience and death of the blessed Emanuel, "God manifest in the flesh." Still the promise of mercy and forgiveness to the repentant sinner, although the grounds of that mercy were veiled by types and figures, was, not obscurely, signified to the people of Israel. And in the later periods at least of that revelation, which they were enjoying through a long succession of ages, the devout Jew might derive substantial comfort from the declaration, that "when the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive. Because he considereth, and turneth away from all his transgressions that he hath committed, he shall

surely live, he shall not die¹." Forgiveness of sins was the blessing, in such declarations, as these, evidently promised to the Israelite: the forsaking of sin and the return to obedience were as evidently the condition, on which the promise was to be accomplished.

The history of the wickedness of Ahab, especially in that part of it which relates to the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, abounds with much matter for solemn admonition to the sinner. Besides the other occasions which it affords for salutary reflection, there is a circumstance at the conclusion of the narrative, which may pave the way for some important reflections upon the subject, which I have already touched on in the introductory observations, that have now been laid before you. The circumstance, to which I allude, you will of course have anticipated me in remarking to be that noticed in my text: where we are informed, that "when Ahab heard those words," namely, the words, wherein the prophet Elijah denounced upon him and his posterity the vengeance of the Almighty for his crimes, "it came to pass that he rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his flesh, and fasted, and lay in sackcloth, and went softly. And the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying,

¹ Ezek. xviii. 28.

Seest thou how Ahab humbleth himself before me? because he humbleth himself before me, I will not bring the evil in his days; but in his son's days will I bring the evil upon his house."

For the encouragement of sinners to repent, that so, by virtue of the Redeemer's sacrifice, their sins may be forgiven, there are two reflections, which the particulars here recited offer to our notice, and which at present, with the divine blessing, I propose to illustrate and enforce. 1st, From the example of Ahab it appears, that there is no sin so great, as to remove the sinner beyond the reach of the divine mercy, provided he be disposed to repentance: 2dly, The will of God to receive and pardon the truly penitent sinner is evidently shewn by the marks of favour, which he testified even to the imperfect and transitory penitence of Ahab. A consideration of these two points, together with a wholesome caution, necessary to be introduced in connection with each, will afford sufficient matter for our present meditations.

1. First, then, it is to be observed, that there is no sin so great, as to remove the sinner beyond the reach of God's mercy, provided he be disposed to repent.

Greater sin, than that of Ahab, is not often to be discovered. In the first introduction to his history, the sacred writer informs us, "that he

did evil in the sight of the Lord above all that were before him¹.” The particulars of his history bear melancholy testimony to the truth of this declaration. In the choice of a partner for his bed and throne, he selected the daughter of an idolatrous king, a woman destitute of all moral principle, and obstinately addicted to the worship of false gods. Prone to evil by his own corrupt inclinations, his vicious disposition received a first impulse from hers. He forsook the worship of the living God, the Lord God of Israel; and “made a grove, and reared up an altar for Baal in the house of Baal, which he had built in Samaria; and went and served Baal, and worshipped him².” Thus by forsaking the commandments of the Lord, and following Baalim, he “troubled Israel; and did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger, than all the kings that were before him³.”

His morality was worthy of his religion: corrupt fruit borne by a corrupt tree: a foul stream flowing from a polluted source. His conduct in the affair of Naboth is a resistless proof, that “he had sold himself to work” moral as well as religious “evil in the sight of the Lord⁴.”

Yet deep and crying as were the sins of this

¹ 1 Kings xvi. 30.

² 1 Kings xvi. 31.

³ 1 Kings xvi. 33.

⁴ 1 Kings xxi. 20.

unprincipled man, and many and great as were the provocations, wherewith he had “provoked the Lord to anger,” and, by fatal influence and example propagating his wickedness among his people, had “made Israel to sin;” Almighty God was nevertheless graciously pleased to shew some testimony of favour towards him. When a doom similar to that, which Elijah denounced on Ahab, had been denounced by other messengers of the Lord on the guilty predecessors of Ahab, Jeroboam and Baasha, who like him had “provoked the Lord to anger and made Israel to sin¹,” they obstinately went on in their wickedness, without any token of sorrow, or any dawnings of repentance. But when it came to pass, upon hearing the words of Elijah, that Ahab, in this particular differing from his more hardened predecessors, “rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his flesh, and fasted, and lay in sackcloth, and went softly;” when he gave testimony of a heart, in some degree awakened to a sense of his iniquity, that iniquity, multiplied and aggravated as it had been, began to find favour in the sight of God: “Seest thou how Ahab humbleth himself before me? Because he humbleth himself before me, I will not bring the evil in his

¹ 1 Kings xiv. 5—16; xvi. 1—7.

days ; but in his son's days, I will bring the evil upon his house."

My brother, Art thou as grievous a sinner, as Ahab was ? Hast thou forsaken the covenant of thy God, and worshipped other gods, and served them ? Hast thou devoted thyself to the bondage of thy own corrupt passions ? Hast thou associated thyself with the abandoned and the sinner ? Hast thou "coveted an evil covetousness to thy house ;" and, in the accomplishment of thy desires, hast thou defrauded and depressed the poor ; hath thy guilt been conceived in falsehood, and hath it brought forth perjury and murder ? Vile and worthless as thou mayest have been, "though thy sins may have been as scarlet, they may become white as snow ; though they may be red like crimson, they may become as wool¹." There is no accumulation of guilt, for the atonement of which the blood of Christ is not all-sufficient : there is no wickedness too great to be compassed by the mercy and loving-kindness of God. Measure it in its length and breadth and depth and height. Infinite in its dimensions, it cannot be exceeded by the wickedness of man, but is ever ready to avert the sentence of condemnation from him, who "humbleth himself before the Lord."

¹ Is. i. 18.

Could we indeed set bounds to the mercy of God, and believe, that there is any sinner, whose wickedness is beyond its reach, who would not have reason to despair of forgiveness for his own iniquity? We do not openly renounce the worship of the living God, and literally bow down before a graven image, as Ahab did: we do not perhaps, as Ahab did, that we may get possession of the property of another, “cause him to be set on high among the people,” and to be falsely accused of blasphemy and treason, and to be “stoned with stones, that he die.” Yet let us seriously reflect on all our thoughts, words, and deeds; let us diligently weigh our proneness to evil; our disinclination to good; let us examine the quantity of evil, which is blended with even the best things that we do; the worldliness of the motives, which actuate us; the want of heavenly-mindedness in our affections; the repugnance, which we feel to the service of God: and we shall perceive too ample cause for being convinced of the necessity of infinite and indefatigable mercy, to withhold the sentence of condemnation from our manifold sins. Of that mercy we all stand in need. To that mercy let us all have recourse. From that mercy let not the greatest sinner despair of receiving comfort and forgiveness; but fly to it with confidence in the atoning blood of the cross, assured that the

Lord is “good and gracious, and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon him¹.”

But then; and it is a caution vigilantly and earnestly to be impressed on all, let the sinner be upon his guard, lest, in trusting to the infinite goodness of God, he suffer himself to be deluded by the deceitfulness of sin, and of his own corrupt heart, and “go on still in his wickedness,” believing that God for Christ’s sake will be gracious unto him in the end. “Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid.” Deep and multiplied as was the sin of Ahab, the Lord was pleased to mitigate or suspend the sentence, which he had previously denounced upon his head. But then that favour was not vouchsafed unto him, until Ahab had given some proof of sorrow and self-abasement; and it was expressly out of regard to that sorrow, that the divine favour was vouchsafed him at all. “Seest thou how Ahab humbleth himself before me?” said the Lord. “*Because he humbleth himself before me*, I will not bring the evil in his days.” Be assured, my brethren, that agreeable to this is the uniform language of the Spirit of God. The mercy of God is boundless, and it is offered freely to the greatest of sinners: to you, to me, to all of us. It is offered too, independently of

¹ Psalm lxxxvi. 5.

any price which we can pay for the purchase of it. The love of God is the motive, which actuates the offer: the blood of Christ is the meritorious price, which hath been paid for the purchase of it. But unless upon the humility, the self-abasement, the repentance of the sinner, to no man will the offer of mercy, the promise of forgiveness, be eventually made good. Do you wish that “ iniquity should not be your ruin ?” Do you wish to escape everlasting death; to flee from “ the worm that dieth not, and from the fire that never shall be quenched ?” Do you tremble at the thought of “ dwelling with everlasting burnings ?” The arms of God are open to receive you, and to yield you a safe refuge from the torments, that are prepared for the devil and his angels. “ He hath no pleasure in the death of him that dieth ¹.” But he at the same time warns you, that there is but one road to that salvation, which He hath provided, and which Christ bled to purchase; and that you must “ repent, and turn away from your wickedness which you have committed, and do that which is lawful and right,” if you would “ save your soul alive ².”

2. And this leads me to remark upon the second point, which I proposed for the subject of

¹ Ezek. xviii. 32.

² Ezek. xviii. 27.

our meditations ; namely, the will of God to pardon those sinners, who are truly penitent, inasmuch as he bestowed a mark of his favour even on the imperfect and transitory repentance of Ahab.

I call the repentance of Ahab imperfect ; for such, if we examine the nature of repentance, and then look to the sorrow evinced by the Israelitish king, we shall perceive his repentance to have been. True repentance consists of several parts ; commencing in a conviction of sin, and thence proceeding through the intermediate steps of contrition, confession, and petitions for forgiveness, it is consummated in reformation and amendment of life. The sinner, who is truly penitent for his offences, endeavours to make all the satisfaction in his power for the injuries, which he has committed. Where he has offended against God, (and indeed every sin, although man be more immediately affected by it, is a transgression of the Divine law, and an offence against God,) but, where the sinner has in a more especial and direct manner offended against God, he is impelled, if his repentance is sincere, to a more diligent performance of God's commandments and a more active zeal in his service. Where man has been the object of his iniquities, he is impelled by the same spirit, if it is the true spirit of penitence and contrition, to

make satisfaction and restitution to him whom he has injured.

Try the repentance of Ahab by this test ; weigh it in this balance of the sanctuary ; and it will prove deceitful upon the weights. Ahab indeed shewed evident marks of grief ; and grief, it is highly probable, that he really felt. “ He rent his clothes, and put on sackcloth upon his flesh, and fasted, and lay in sackcloth, and went softly : ” all of them outward expressions of great sorrow and heaviness, such as it is probable that he felt within. But allowing his sorrow to have been unfeigned, whence did it proceed ? Was it from apprehension of punishment, of that alarming and tremendous punishment, which the Lord God by his prophet had denounced upon his sins ; or was it from a due sense and hatred and abhorrence of his sins themselves ? The general character of Ahab may lead us to suppose, that his sorrow was occasioned, rather by the fear of punishment, than by a due sense of the hatefulness of sin, and therefore that it had little connexion with true repentance.

But allowing farther that the sorrow of Ahab proceeded from something like a proper sense of sin, from a conviction that he was thereby made an object of hatred and abhorrence in the eyes of the God of holiness, what effects did it afterwards produce ? Did it lead to a renewal of his heart,

to a reformation of his life? Did it prevail on him to make restitution of the vineyard, of which his iniquity had put him in possession? Did it induce him to forsake the idolatrous worship of Baal, and to return to the service of the Lord God of Israel, whom he had provoked to anger by his provocations, and by selling himself to work wickedness in his sight? Of these testimonies to the truth of Ahab's repentance the Scriptures give us no intimation: they do not describe him to us as a convert from sin and impiety to righteousness and true holiness: they afford us no proof of his having engaged in the service of the Lord, or of his having practised restitution to man: they leave us to the ungrateful reflection, that, whatever marks of sorrow he evinced at first, his penitence was at least of a very questionable nature; and by the few particulars of his life, which they afterwards record, they lead us to infer, that his sorrow was as transitory as it was imperfect.

Yet upon this repentance, deficient as it was in those qualities, which give to true repentance any value in the sight of God, even upon this imperfect, insubstantial, shadowy repentance the Almighty was pleased to look with an eye of compassion, and to declare in mitigation of his punishment, "Because Ahab humbleth himself before me, I will not bring the evil in his days."

But wherefore was this gracious promise, unless it were to shew, that he, “ whose property is always to have mercy,” is ready to regard with complacency, and to promote with the visitations of his grace, the first infant dawns of penitence in the heart of the sinner ; that he will not “ break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax ;” but that he is continually “ on the watch¹,” as it were, over sinners to “ lead them by his goodness to repentance² ?” And shall not we believe, my brethren, that that gracious and merciful Being, who had such respect to the humiliation of Ahab, will have compassion upon all those, who “ with hearty repentance and true faith turn unto him ?” Shall we not believe, that he will assist their feeble endeavours with his Spirit, and forgive them for the sake of his Son ? Surely it needs not much to convince us, that “ though the Lord cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies. For he doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men³.”

Whilst however we thus admire the mercy of God displayed towards Ahab, because of his imperfect repentance, let us take heed that we do not trust our pardon to such repentance as his. Although Almighty God may look with com-

¹ Jer. xxxi. 28.² Rom. ii. 4.³ Lam. iii. 32, 33.

placency on the first dawnings of penitence, as the means under his gracious blessing of "creating us anew in righteousness and true holiness," it is not with such sorrow, as that of the Israelitish king, that we must permit ourselves to be contented, if we would let repentance "have her perfect work." It was the error and ruin of Ahab, that he stopped short of the point, at which the denunciation of Elijah should have prompted him to aspire; that he ended where he should have begun. Had he, like the people of Nineveh, to whom the prophet Jonah was sent to proclaim for their wickedness, "yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown;" had Ahab, like the people of Nineveh, at the same time that he covered himself with sackcloth, "cried mightily unto God; had he turned from his evil way, and from the violence that was in his hands;" who can tell, if God would have "turned and repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto him, and turned away from his fierce anger, that he," as well as the Ninevites, "might perish not¹?" Had Ahab, like David, when the prophet Nathan was sent to convince him of his sin, acknowledged his sin unto the Lord, under a contrite sense of his inward pollution, and with devout supplications to the Lord to "blot out all

¹ Jonah iii. 9, 10.

his iniquities, to make him a clean heart, and to renew a right spirit within him¹ ;” who can tell, but that Elijah would have been commissioned to give to him the same comfortable assurance, which Nathan gave to David, “ The Lord also hath put away thy sin ; thou shalt not die² ?” Of this we may be certain, for it is what the Spirit of God uniformly assures us of, that, had the repentance of Ahab been sincere and lasting, it would have been followed by the forgiveness of his sins. His repentance was not sincere ; and his ruin followed. Let us avoid his error, that so, by the divine blessing, we may escape his punishment. Let us not be satisfied with that “ sorrow of the world, which worketh death ;” but let us cultivate that “ godly sorrow, which worketh repentance to salvation, not to be repented of³ .” For the same holy Spirit of God, who, by the mouth of his prophet Elijah, denounced evil upon Ahab and his posterity for the provocation wherewith he provoked God to anger, “ hath in these last days spoken to us by his Son ;” and, whilst on the one hand he “ promises absolution and remission of sins to all them that truly repent and unfeignedly believe his holy Gospel,” he admonishes us on the other hand in language, which, although the sinner

¹ Ps. li. 9, 10.² 2 Sam. xii. 13.³ 2 Cor. vii. 10.

may despise it, he cannot misunderstand, “ Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish ¹. ”

I conclude with an excellent collect from our Liturgy : Almighty Father, who hast given thine only Son to die for our sins, and to rise again for our justification ; Grant us so to put away the leaven of malice and wickedness, that we may alway serve thee in pureness of living and truth, through the merits of the same thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord : to whom with thee, O Father, and thee, O Holy Ghost, one Lord and God Almighty, be honour and glory. Amen.

¹ Luke xiii. 3.

SERMON XLV.

THE DOWNWARD TENDENCY OF VICE ILLUSTRATED
BY THE SIN OF GEHAZI.

2 KINGS v. 20.

But Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the man of God, said, Behold, my master hath spared Naaman this Syrian, in not receiving at his hands that which he brought; but, as the Lord liveth, I will run after him, and take somewhat of him.

IF there were no other consideration to convince us of “the deceitfulness of sin,” and of the danger which we incur by giving way to criminal desires, this reflection alone might be sufficient for the purpose; that he, who once enters upon the career of vice, is not aware at first of the extent to which he may be carried, and has not the power of laying down rules for his government, and saying to himself, “Hitherto shalt thou go, and no farther.” There is a natural connexion between one sin and another, so that they thrive by mutual encouragement. For the

attainment of a sinful end, sinful means must generally be practised ; for virtue can be rarely made subservient to the purposes of vice : besides, one guilty purpose or action serves to make readier way for another ; for he, who has submitted to one temptation to sin, is less capable of resisting a second. It has been somewhere said, that vice is on a declivity : the remark is founded on truth. As long as we stand upon the top of the eminence, we may be considered to a certain extent, by the blessing of God on our exertions, as our own masters : but when we once begin to descend, we gradually lose our self-control ; step by step we go downwards with increasing swiftness ; until at length we are hurried involuntarily on with a force so multiplied, that we have no longer the power even had we the inclination, to withstand.

Of this downward tendency of vice, of this connexion between one crime and another, of this danger which attends the indulgence of a criminal desire, we have an alarming instance in the narrative suggested to your consideration. In the former part of the chapter, we are presented with a very gratifying account of an acquisition, made from among the heathen, of a faithful votary to the service of the true God. In the latter part we have the melancholy spectacle of one, who had been previously engaged

in that service, departing from his allegiance, and plunging into a variety of wickedness for the gratification of one criminal desire. Naaman, the Syrian, having been healed of his leprosy by Elisha, the prophet of the Lord, was desirous of testifying his gratitude by conferring a recompense, which the prophet, regardless of his own interest, and anxious only for the honour of God, resolutely refused to accept. Not so Gehazi, the servant of Elisha, the man of God. Whilst the thoughts and affections of his master "were set on things above," his were grovelling "on things upon the earth." Whilst his master was zealous only for the honour of Jehovah, he was meditating how to promote his own worldly interest. Instigated by "the love of money, that root of all evil," as the apostle calls it, "which while some have coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows¹," he condemned the forbearance of Elisha, in refusing to accept the presents of the Syrian commander, and determined that he himself would profit by the generosity of the one, and the disinterestedness of the other. "Behold," said he, "my master hath spared Naaman, this Syrian, in not receiving at his hands that which he brought: but as the Lord

¹ 1 Tim. vi. 10.

liveth, I will run after him, and take somewhat of him." The execution of this purpose, criminal itself in the first place, and then leading to a great variety and accumulation of guilt, until it was recompensed by the sentence of the prophet, that in righteous vengeance for the covetousness of Gehazi, "the leprosy of Naaman should cleave unto him and unto his seed for ever," may afford matter for much practical observation, conducive to our instruction and improvement.

1. The purpose of Gehazi was in the first place criminal in itself. It was a purpose of dishonesty ; for there is no reason to suppose, but that he intended to convert to his own use that which he professed to receive for the use of his master. It was a purpose of disrespect to Elisha, to whom as his master he owed honour ; but whose conduct he took upon himself to condemn, and to whom he was preparing to violate his duty. It was a purpose of irreverence to God ; for it was in the capacity of "the man of God," that Elisha had held communication with Naaman, and, having healed him of his leprosy, had refused to receive a present in return. And now Gehazi determined on a measure, conceived in opposition to the express declaration of the prophet of the Lord. Thus does it appear, that the first desire and purpose of Gehazi was criminal in itself. Would you avoid his guilt ? consider whether

your purposes are not open to the same or the like animadversion as his. Are your wishes agreeable to the rules of honesty and justice ; to those laws, which are ordained for the *general* well-being of society, to regulate the *general* intercourse between man and man ? Are they agreeable to the duties, which belong to the *particular* state of life, in which it has pleased God to place you ; to those duties, which you have to fulfil in your domestic and other relations, and which you are required to fulfil “ not with eye-service, as men-pleasers, but as the servants of Christ¹ ? ” Are they agreeable to the reverence that you owe to the will of God, which he hath delivered by the mouth of his inspired messengers, and which we, the servants of the Lord, are commissioned to enforce upon you ? If your desires and purposes will not endure such a scrutiny as this, if they cannot be pronounced agreeable to the duty which you owe both to God and to man, encourage them not ; act not on them ; restrain, renounce, discard them ; lest, ripening into action, they soon entangle you in wickedness, various and multiplied as was the sin of Gehazi.

2. For, secondly, and this is the point on which I would principally enlarge, the purpose

¹ Eph. vi. 6.

of Gehazi to procure a part of the presents, which Naaman had brought to Elisha, engaged him in the commission of various and accumulated guilt. The foundation was laid in falsehood ; a beginning suitable to the desire that occasioned it, and to the consequences which ensued. Following hastily after Naaman, who, on perceiving his approach, immediately stopped and lighted down from his chariot, with the kind enquiry, " Is all well," he replied, " All is well ; my master hath sent me, saying, Behold, even now there be come to me from mount Ephraim two young men of the sons of the prophets : give them, I pray thee, a talent of silver, and two changes of garments." Such was the opening of his career of wickedness ; a direct and determined falsehood ! Even had the purpose of Gehazi been of a *lawful* kind, such means ought not to have been adopted for effecting it. He ought not to have " done evil," even " that *good* might come¹ ;" much less should he have framed a lie for a purpose decidedly *unlawful*. My brethren, it is a characteristic which the apostle sets forth of " men of corrupt minds," to be " destitute of the truth²." It is one of the marks, which he attributes to the heathen world, lost to the knowledge of God and " given over

¹ Rom. iii. 8.² 1 Tim. vi. 5.

by him to a reprobate mind, to work all uncleanness with greediness," that they were "full of deceit¹." It is one of the evidences, which he brings forward of "the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness," that they who are thus "renewed in the spirit of their mind," "put away lying, and speak the truth, every man with his neighbour²." Would you be purified from the corruption of your nature? would you be renewed in the image of God? as one necessary measure, flee falsehood. Do you wish to be informed more particularly of the hatefulness and noxiousness of this quality? Do you wish to know how it is regarded by the Almighty? Hear the words of the wise king, who tells you, that "lying lips are abomination to the Lord³." Do you wish to know whither it will lead you? Listen to the warning of the apostle, who admonishes you, that "without," that is, shut out of the abodes of happiness provided for the blessed in heaven, "are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie⁴."

Further: the falsehood of Gehazi was aggravated by the circumstances, under which it was

¹ Rom. i. 29.

² Eph. iv. 25.

³ Prov. xii. 22.

⁴ Rev. xxii. 15.

uttered. Consider the persons, who were affected by it. One was Naaman, a generous noble-spirited man, filled with gratitude towards Elisha, who had been the instrument in the hand of Providence for effecting his cure, and eager to testify his gratitude by a suitable recompense to his benefactor. Of the generous feelings, of the grateful heart of Naaman, advantage was now to be taken : this was the subject, on which the duplicity of Gehazi was to work : the liberality of his temper was to be made the occasion of the fraud, that should be practised upon him. I notice it not as an uncommon case ; for it is the generous and truly liberal man, who most usually becomes the victim of the artifices of the designing : but I notice it as a consideration, which aggravates the guilt of Gehazi, in practising upon a mind, to which treatment so widely different was due.

Another sufferer by his artifice was probably his master, the man of God, the prophet Elisha himself. At least such an effect was likely to be produced by it. For the request made to Naaman in the name of Elisha was of “ a talent of silver, and two changes of garments.” The occasion of the request was stated to be the arrival of two young men of the sons of the prophets from mount Ephraim, where it seems there was a school for their education. Now the request

was very disproportionate to the occasion. For why should Elisha wish to bestow on two young scholars a sum of money so large as a talent of silver ; a sum, equal to some hundred pounds of our money, and capable, as is intimated by Elisha, of purchasing “oliveyards, and vineyards, and sheep, and oxen, and menservants and maidservants ?” The construction then, which Naaman would be naturally led to put upon the request, considered with reference to the pretended occasion of it, would be by no means creditable to the character of Elisha. He would be led to suppose, that, however the prophet might wish to make a shew of disinterestedness, and decline to receive in public a present at his hands, he was not in reality so free, as he appeared, from the desire of gain ; but, whilst he pretended to be exclusively devoted to the service of the Lord, was in reality not exempt from the dominion of mammon. Thus the falsehood of Gehazi, in its bearing upon the character of his master, assumes a new appearance : instead of being a simple untruth it becomes a grievous slander ; and, as it before was seen to be an artifice practised on the generosity of Naaman, so now it appears injurious to the character of Elisha.

And, if such was probably its effect on the character of the prophet, it was at the same time

calculated to do dishonour to God. It was the object doubtless of Elisha, in refusing the presents of Naaman, to be an occasion of honour to the Lord God of Israel, that the Syrian commander might “see his good works, and glorify” the almighty Being, whom he served with a view rather to his glory than to his own gain. The character of Elisha, then, could not be impeached without the glory of God being assailed. The honour of the Lord was, in some sort and in the eyes of the heathens to whom he had been unknown, implicated in the conduct of his prophet. The falsehood of Gehazi thus presents itself to our minds with a fresh accession of guilt: it appears with a darker complexion and in more odious colours: in its bearing upon Naaman and Elisha, considered by themselves alone, it is an immoral act; in its relation to the Lord God of Elisha, it is an impious act: in one respect, it is an offence against man; in the other an offence against God.

Here again, my brethren, let us pause, to meditate on the example set before us. It is sufficient indeed that we know the evil character, the sinfulness, the odiousness in the eyes of God, of any act, in order to be convinced, that we should avoid it. It was sufficient for Gehazi to know, that the lie which he meditated was sinful, and that alone should have deterred him from uttering it. Still, had he been hardened against that

reflection, others there are, which if he had given them admission into his heart, might have produced a more powerful effect. Shall I, he might have thus reasoned with himself, shall I deliver this base falsehood ; a falsehood, by which I am imposing so grossly on the generous spirit of the noble Naaman ; a falsehood, by which I am slandering and dishonouring the character of my master Elisha ; a falsehood, by which, in natural consequence, I am giving occasion to the enemy to blaspheme the name of the true God, the Lord God of Israel ? How can we tell, but that such reflections on the circumstances of his meditated falsehood, might by the grace of God have operated duly on his mind, and stayed him from “ running after the Syrian Naaman, that he might receive somewhat at his hands.”

The suggestion is not unworthy of our attention. It may prompt us, before we act, to consider, not only the nature of the action itself, but the circumstances which attend it, and its bearing upon others. You are about to commit a sinful deed. Duly consider its consequences to yourself, and that may deter you from the commission of it. Add to that consideration its effect on others ; and, whilst the deed itself will thereby assume an appearance more exceedingly sinful, a fresh motive will be supplied to pre-

serve you against temptation. Will it not, think you, have some weight upon your decision, will it not, think you, have some influence upon your conduct, that your sinful resolution cannot be executed without imposing upon the worthy, without injuring the innocent, without dishonouring God? Will it not, perhaps, stagger your resolution, to consider, that by the very means, whereby you propose wickedly to advance your own interest, others must be made sufferers; that the effects of your sin may be felt in sorrow by your friends perhaps, or your family; and that occasion will thereby be given to the unbeliever to blaspheme the name of God and of Christ, when you, that are called by that holy name, give the lie to your profession of holiness, and rush desperately into sin? Remember, that he, who commits a crime, of which the consequences may be reasonably conjectured, is in equity answerable for those consequences, though they may be such, as he did not wish or intend. If, by reason of your wilful wickedness, virtue is oppressed or injured, religion dishonoured or disesteemed, the responsibility will press with a heavy burden upon *you*; the evil, which you have occasioned, is to be added to the wickedness, which you have committed; and, as your sin is increased by its operation upon others, so, it is to

be apprehended, your punishment will also be, “in the day when God shall judge every man according to his deeds.”

To proceed however to the sequel of the story of Gehazi. Having succeeded, and more than succeeded, in his iniquitous purpose, for the generosity of the man whom he was deceiving would not be content with granting the request, but compelled him to receive the double of what he had desired ; having thus, I say, succeeded in his purpose, his next endeavour was to conceal his fraud from his master, and to profit securely by his wickedness. But God, who had beheld the sin, determined on an instant punishment. When therefore he had secreted his spoil, “and went in and stood before his master,” he was greeted with the formidable salutation, “Whence comest thou, Gehazi ?” A salutation, formidable indeed to the guilty man, for no alternative was offered in his reply to the enquiry, but an avowal of his guilt, or a fresh falsehood to conceal it. Confession would have been the better and more prudent step. But previous wickedness hardens the heart by the just judgment of God, and prepares it for the commission of the wickedness which is to follow. The lie, with which he had deluded the Syrian commander, paved the way for another, with which he hoped as successfully

to baffle the penetration of a prophet of the Lord. Ashamed therefore of being discovered in his iniquity, by a human eye, but not ashamed of being exposed to the eye, which is always open, during a repetition of his sin ; afraid of incurring the penalty of his disobedience from an earthly master, but not afraid of the punishment, which an heavenly and an almighty Master could inflict ; shrinking from the remonstrance of the prophet, but not regarding the vengeance of the Lord ; he had again recourse to the artifice, with which he had already effected his purpose. Falsehood begat falsehood : sin was resorted to, as the remedy of sin. “ And he said, Thy servant went no whither.” Unhappy man ! To brave the anger of the all-wise and omnipotent God, in the person of his prophet ; and to forget, that He, who had inspired Elisha with wisdom to reveal to Naaman the remedy for his leprosy, must have wisdom to search out all his ways ; that He, who had cured by his will the disease of the humble suppliant, must have power to inflict the merited punishment upon the wilful and obdurate sinner ! Regardless of that wisdom, fearless of that power, the miserable man declared himself free from offence. Thus, in having recourse to a second falsehood, he incurred more heinous and complicated guilt. In

his conversation with Naaman he was engaged with a mere human being ; in his conversation with Elisha he was engaged with one inspired by the Spirit of the Lord : in the former case he lied unto man only ; in the latter he “ lied not unto man, but unto God.”

My brother ; hast thou, like Gehazi, conceived a sinful purpose ? hast thou suffered it to be matured into action, to be executed and to be accomplished, like him ? And does the Spirit of God by any of the means, which he now uses to convince men of sin, by the still small voice of conscience within you, or by the reading or hearing of his holy word, or by the admonition of your friends, or by the preaching of his ministers ; does the Spirit of God, I say, by any of these means call you to account for your doings ? Beware, lest by closing your heart to his suggestions, you fatally deceive yourself, whilst you attempt in vain to deceive and escape from him. Beware, lest being reprov'd by him for all the evils which you have done, you add yet this above all, that you deny your sinfulness, and lie unto the Holy Ghost. Sooner or later, in this world or in the next, however you may attempt to conceal it, be sure that “ your sin will find you out ;” and that, as your sin has been, so shall be your punishment. When Gehazi at-

tempted by a shameless falsehood to deceive a prophet of the Lord, the sentence of retribution was pronounced upon him, and “ he went out from his presence a leper as white as snow.” When Ananias and Sapphira conceived a like thing in their heart, and “ agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord,” they “ fell down straightway,” an awful monument of divine vengeance, “ and yielded up the ghost¹.” Beware of their sin. Beware of their punishment. Great as your wickedness may have been, if you will confess your sins unto the Lord, and strive to second his preventing and assisting grace, and with hearty repentance and true faith turn unto him ; the blood of Christ shall cleanse you from your pollutions, the Lord shall put away your sin, and you shall not die. But if you will obstinately persist in wickedness, and shut your heart against the warnings of a gracious God, the sentence of condemnation shall go forth against you : “ the leprosy,” the leprosy of sin, “ shall cleave unto thee for ever,” and “ eternal death shall be thy portion amid weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

May it please Almighty God of his great mercy to bring into the way of truth all such as have erred and are deceived ; may it please him

¹ Acts v. 3—10.

to strengthen such as do stand, and to comfort and help the weak-hearted, and to raise up them that fall, and finally to beat down Satan under our feet, through Jesus Christ our Saviour; to whom with the Father and the Holy Ghost, three Persons and one God, be all honour and power for ever and ever. Amen.

SERMON XLVI.

THE HEALING OF THE LEPROSY EMBLEMATICAL OF THE CLEANSING OF SIN.

LUKE xvii. 12, 13.

And as he entered into a certain village, there met him ten men that were lepers, which stood afar off:

And they lifted up their voices, and said, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.

THE various actions of our blessed Saviour's life, and especially those of a miraculous nature, are calculated to produce a twofold effect. In their primary intention, they serve as a foundation, on which his followers may rest their faith. But there is also a second use, to which they may be applied, as conducing to the practical improvement of his disciples. For the several occurrences, in which we see him engaged, especially those of healing the natural infirmities of men, are capable of a spiritual application; and may very properly be considered, as holding him up to our veneration under the character of the great

Physician, not of the bodies only, but also of the souls of mankind.

There is no kind of miracle, to which the preceding observation more applies, than to that, a specimen of which is alluded to in the text, and recorded in those and some following verses. For there is no disease, which more aptly represents sin, than the particular disease of leprosy, noticed in the passage before us: and consequently by no miracle, which he wrought, did our blessed Saviour furnish a more appropriate emblem of the spiritual purpose, for which he came into the world; namely, that of "saving his people from their sins."

The leprosy is a hateful, loathsome, contagious disorder; spreading itself over the whole system, most difficult to be cured, most easy to be communicated, an occasion of severe suffering to the miserable patient, and an object of disgust and abhorrence to the beholders. Similar to this, in these particulars, is sin, the leprosy of the soul. Disseminating its venom from one part to another of the same body, and then from one body to another; intolerable to be borne, odious to be beheld, and incapable of being exterminated by mere human skill; it is a fit object for the mercy, and it requires for its cleansing the omnipotent power, of Him "who is alone mighty to save." Of the alacrity, with which our Saviour is pre-

pared to heal the sinner, when he calls upon him for the exercise of his compassion, we have an emblem in the cure which he wrought for the ten lepers, who are mentioned in the narrative before us. For the regulation of our conduct, if we would be cured of our spiritual leprosy, the same narrative will supply us with some useful rules, in the exemplification both of what we are to do, and of what we are to avoid. It is to this use that I propose to apply the narrative upon the present occasion : and may it please Almighty God to give efficacy to our meditations, and to direct them to the cleansing of our souls for the merits of Him, “ who came into the world to save sinners !”

1. In the early part of the narrative, the conduct of all the wretched sufferers recorded may serve for our imitation. “ As he entered into a certain village, there met him ten men which were lepers, which stood afar off ; And they lifted up their voices, and said, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.” Now these men, it is evident, were in possession of one thing, without which it cannot be reasonably expected that any affliction, whether temporal or spiritual, should be removed. They possessed a sense of their misery ; and that prompted them to discover a method for its relief.

Are you possessed of the like sense ? Are you

eager for a like cure? Are you conscious that you are a sinner? Are you alive to the nature and consequences of sin? Do you know that it was sin, which first defiled the divine similitude in Adam, who had been created in the image, after the likeness, of God? that it was sin, which caused him to be driven out of Paradise? that it was sin, which robbed him of immortality, and caused a sentence of death to be passed on him and on all his descendants? Do you know that by sin you have further polluted a nature, corrupt by inheritance; that by sin you have actually made yourself abominable in the sight of God; that by sin you are excluded from his favour in this world and left destitute of every claim to his felicity in the next; that by sin you are now made the slave of the devil, and, unless you heartily repent and reform, will hereafter be made partaker of his torments, and of the damnation of hell? It is because men do not know, at least do not seriously consider and lay to heart, the origin, and hatefulness, and the present misery, and the future consequences of sin, that they do not earnestly endeavour to be cured of it. Would you sit down contented under a malady, which you knew would prove fatal to you, unless it were cured? Would you knowingly suffer a disease to increase upon you, and acquire strength, and gradually advance, until

it brought you to the very brink of dissolution, without taking measures to check and correct it? Is it reasonable, is it agreeable to men's natural feelings and apprehensions, to do so? Why then is it, that the sinner will rest satisfied in a state of sin; why will he suffer his corruption to increase upon him, until, "from the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in him, but wounds and bruises and putrifying sores¹," which must eventually plunge him into the torments of hell-fire, unless it be that he doth not know, or will not consider, the peril of his condition; and reflects not with the seriousness, which so important a truth demands, that, as certainly as a mortal disease terminates in death in this world, so certainly will unrepented and unforsaken sin be followed by death, everlasting death, in another? Surely if men were duly sensible of their danger, they would not be satisfied under it; but would lift up their voices like the lepers, and seek for mercy where alone it can be found.

2. And this leads me to speak, secondly, of Him to whom the sinner must apply for help. "Jesus, Master," said the lepers, "have mercy on us." They were sensible, not of their wretchedness only, but of their utter inability to help

¹ Isa. i. 6.

themselves, and of the inability of any human power to help them. Convinced at the same time of the power of him, who had “gone about all the country teaching in the synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people,” convinced, I say, both of his power and willingness to cure them, they threw themselves upon his compassion for their cure.

And whither shall the sinner turn for the remedy of his sin, but to the same powerful and gracious Saviour? Whither shall we turn, my brethren, but unto the same Jesus, if we would be healed of our leprosy? In him there is salvation, and in no other. The lepers had experienced that there was no other cure for their temporal malady, and so would have continued to experience to their cost; but they cried unto him, and they were cleansed. They might have tried every expedient, which human ingenuity could suggest for their remedy; and so may we; but in each case with the like failure of our hopes; with the like severe disappointment. Where could they have found the remedy which they sought for their disease, where can we find the remedy which we want for our sins, but in the same great Physician, “who healeth those that are broken in heart, and giveth medicine

to heal their sickness?" Our own treacherous hearts, the seducing wisdom of the world, and withal the artifices of the devil, may combine to persuade us, that there is some other atonement for sin; that there is some other Redeemer, mighty to save. My brethren, believe them not. Let us resolutely resist their temptations, stedfast in the faith; and let us be constantly persuaded, on the unerring testimony of the word of God, that "there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved, but only the name of our Lord Jesus Christ¹."

But infinitely removed as he is above us, how are we to apply to him for help? In this respect again the lepers may serve to guide us. "They lifted up their voices, and said, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." They called upon him for help with earnest prayer and supplication; and their entreaty was not disregarded by him, "whose property is always to have mercy."

Prayer with us, as with them, is the mean, whereby we must hold communion with the Saviour. Personally in a bodily form present to them, he is no less present to us by his Spirit. They beheld him with the material eye: to us he is visible by the eye of faith. With that eye we

¹ Acts iv. 12.

may contemplate him, no longer in his state of earthly humiliation, but still appearing in the likeness of men ; seated on the right hand of the throne of God, and ready to accept our prayers, and present them to his Father, clothed with the incense of his merits, as a sacrifice of a sweet smelling savour. To all, who call upon him with earnest, diligent, and constant prayer, he is prepared to listen with an ear of gracious complacency. This is the mean, which he hath himself appointed, whereby we may converse, as it were, with him : whereby we may communicate to him our wants, and petition for his assistance, and receive a comfortable assurance in return that our petitions shall be granted ; “ Ask and ye shall receive,” saith he, “ that your joy may be full¹.” The mercy granted to the supplication of the lepers is a satisfactory example of the efficacy of prayer ; it is an example, too, of a very delightful kind, and calculated to inspire confidence into the heart of the humble and sincere suppliant. For what could be more simple than their entreaty, “ Jesus, Master, have mercy on us ?” An entreaty, not recommended to the notice of the Lord by any pomp or variety of expression, but the unaffected dictate of hearts, deeply sensible of their own distress, and per-

¹ John xvi. 24.

suaded of his power to help them. My brethren, it is "the fervent prayer," which the Almighty vouchsafes to regard : it is to them who "worship him in spirit and in truth," that God, who is a spirit, yields a favourable ear. "Lord, have mercy upon me, a sinner,"—"Jesus, Master, have mercy on us," will always secure the favour of God upon them, who draw near him with a true heart in full assurance of faith.

3. Such was the case with the lepers, whose disease and cure we are considering. "When he saw them, he said unto them, Go shew yourselves unto the priest. And it came to pass, that, as they went, they were cleansed." And here, as we before noticed with approbation the earnest appeal of the diseased for mercy, so we must not fail of remarking in this place their ready obedience to Him, on whom they relied. It would have been as easy for him to pronounce the word, and to say, as on another occasion, when he was solicited for a similar cure, "I will, be thou clean¹;" but he rather chose to impose a task upon the suppliants, partly, we may suppose, in conformity to the law of Moses, which required the cure of a leper to be attested by the priest²; and partly, to make trial of the obedience of those, who had entreated his compassion.

¹ Matt. viii. 3.

² Lev. xiv.

The gift was free ; but the benefit of it was suspended on the compliance of the lepers with the condition annexed to the gift. “ Go shew yourselves unto the priest.” Had they refused to go, we have no authority for supposing, that their cure would have been effected ; but rather we have much authority for supposing from the analogy of Scripture, that the cure would have been withheld. Better advised however than to doubt the wisdom of their Saviour, they went ; and “ as they went, they were cleansed.”

Would to God that every sinner, who professes to come unto Christ for health, and to cry “ Jesus, Master, have mercy on me,” could be persuaded to act as if he believed, that obedience to the commandments of Christ is necessary to all those who look to him for salvation, and that he “ will take vengeance in flaming fire on them that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ¹.” Many men are ready enough to call Christ their Saviour, but they are not so ready to take him for their Lord : they are ready to profess, that they trust to be saved by and through him, but they are not so ready to practise towards him that obedience, without which they have no warrant for expecting that salvation will be vouchsafed to them. Salvation and the forgive-

¹ 2 Thess. i. 8.

ness of sins, like the healing of the leprosy, is a free gift of God's mercy through Christ. It is freely offered to all men. But will it be eventually bestowed on all? The Scriptures will not authorize us in believing that it will. On whom then will it be bestowed? Doubtless, on them, who embrace it as the gift of God, with absolute submission to his wisdom, and with an earnest desire and endeavour to comply with the terms, on which the gift is suspended.

“Go, shew thyself to the priest,” was the language of Christ on this occasion; and in some of his other miracles it was not unusual with him, to annex a condition to be performed to the benefit which was to be conferred. To the benefits attendant on, and introductory to, forgiveness of sins, he in like manner annexes several conditions. Of outward ordinances he pronounces two to be generally necessary to salvation, baptism and the holy communion of his body and blood: of inward graces he declares the indispensable necessity of several; such as faith, and repentance, and the renewal of the heart, and holiness, and the keeping of God's commandments, and the love of God and of our neighbour. It had been a bold and an unwise thing in the lepers, when Christ told them to “go, shew themselves to the priest,” had they replied, we will not go: yet what shall we say of those, who

call on him for mercy, and yet refuse to do as he commands them? By some his outward ordinances, his appointed means of grace, ordained with a promise of his blessing united to them, are openly decried; by some they are despised or neglected: by others the inward graces themselves, so far from being sought after by the appointed means, are esteemed little essential to the Christian character at all. Thus the Gospel of Christ is mutilated, while men, grown wise in their own conceits, flatter themselves that they shall arrive at heaven by ways of their own contrivance, careless as they are of those, which the Author of their salvation hath provided. What then have we to do, but carefully to avoid such dangerous errors, and to adhere submissively and constantly to the word of truth? to observe those holy sacraments, which Christ hath instituted for the purpose of introducing us into the kingdom of heaven? to cultivate those Christian virtues, which he recommends to us by the assurance, that “without them no man shall see the Lord¹?” in a word, to submit ourselves in all things with an unqualified and unreserved obedience to the revealed will of our heavenly Father, as proclaimed to us by his Son Jesus Christ; and so to walk in the path of

¹ Heb. xii. 14.

his commandments, that we may go on our way rejoicing in the most comfortable reflection, that Christ hath cleansed us of our sins ?

4. Thus far the conduct of all the lepers may serve for an object of imitation to us. They were all sensible of their distress ? they all called upon Christ to heal them ; and they all complied with his commandment in going to shew themselves to the priest. But the weakness and ingratitude of human nature now began to be displayed. In the hour of their affliction, under the pressing sense of their misery and infirmity, they had recourse to Christ for mercy : but, when that mercy was exerted in their behalf, and they felt themselves healed of their leprosy, neglectful of the gracious Being, who had effected the cure, by far the greater part of them unthankfully went their way. “ One of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face at Jesus’s feet, giving him thanks : And he was a Samaritan. And Jesus answering said, Were there not ten cleansed ? but where are the nine ? There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger.”

This is indeed not a pleasing representation, but is it not too true a representation of human nature ? Out of the multitudes of those, who receive blessings at the hand of God, how small

is the portion of them who receive his blessings with gratitude, and return them with thankfulness?

Enquire with respect to the most common blessings which we enjoy; our life, our health, our strength, the food which we eat, the garments which cover us, the air which we breathe, and the sun by which we are enlightened: are not all these things conferred upon us all by the dispensation of a bountiful Providence? But do all of us receive them as the gracious gifts of him, from whom all good things do come? We are taught by our blessed Lord and Master, continually "to pray to our heavenly Father to give us day by day our daily bread." The petition is heard, and granted by the supply of our necessary wants. Does the grant excite within us lively emotions of gratitude to the Giver? If it does, whence then that murmuring and repining, that profusion and prodigality, that indifference to the glory of God and to the comfort and well-being of our fellow-creatures, which we betray, nurtured as we are by the care and fed by the hand of God?

Pursue the enquiry in its application to more special blessings; to those of less uniform and constant occurrence, and therefore such as are more likely to awaken a sense of gratitude to the

Giver of all good. Visit the abode of sickness ; observe the miserable and helpless victim of disease, pining under the pressure of immediate suffering, and convinced of his weakness, as well as of his wretchedness. Hear him in the agony of pain lifting up his voice and saying, " Jesus, Master, have mercy on me." The prayer is heard : the petition is granted : the Saviour of the world intercedes for the suffering suppliant : and the decree of mercy goes forth from the eternal throne, " I will, be thou clean." Again cast your eye on him, whom you lately contemplated debilitated both in body and in mind by disease, but in whom reviving health hath restored the spring and vigour of his animal spirits. Is he now the same devout and humble being, whom you visited on the bed of disease ? Is he still possessed of the same lowly sense of his own feebleness, and of his dependence on an almighty arm ? Is that gracious God, on whom his thoughts were bent in sickness, still present to him in the vigour of health ? Is the petition of mercy in time of need, changed into the song of thankfulness in return for the mercy that has been bestowed ? Wherefore then that imperfect repentance, those broken vows and purposes of amendment, that faint devotion to the calls of religion, and that eager recurrence to the busi-

ness and pleasures, the pomps and vanity of the world, by which the visitations of disease are too often and too sadly followed ?

Once more, consider the enquiry, as it relates to the forgiveness of sins. To all of us, sinful as we are by nature, the merciful proffer is made, “Repent and believe the Gospel; it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth¹.” To all of us, weak as we are by nature as well as sinful, the promise of aid is given to enable us to work out our salvation, “My grace is sufficient for thee, my strength is made perfect in weakness².” To all of us is preached through Jesus Christ the forgiveness of sins, and we are assured that “by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which we could not be justified³” by any righteousness of our own. But are the good tidings of salvation through faith in a crucified Saviour received by all of us with those sensations of gratitude, with that desire to promote the glory of God, which blessings so incalculable should excite? Do we, all of us, with a lively sense of that mercy, which is extended to heal us, turn back from the ways of wickedness? Do we all “with

¹ Mark i. 15. Rom. i. 16.

² 2 Cor. xii. 9.

³ Acts xiii. 39.

a loud voice glorify God, and fall down on our face at his feet, giving him thanks ?” Or rather may not the pathetic expostulation of the Redeemer of the world be repeated to us, “ Were there not ten cleansed ? but where are the nine ?” While the offer of the forgiveness of sins, of the cleansing of our spiritual leprosy, is freely made to all, does one in ten, does one in a hundred, embrace it as he ought, with prayers of devout adoration to the God of his life and of his strength ? Do we acknowledge, that it is of the free mercy and love alone of our heavenly Father, that the gift of everlasting life is vouchsafed to us miserable sinners ? that it is by virtue of the precious blood-shedding of Christ alone, that we can be rescued from the wages of sin ? that it is by the preventing and assisting grace of the Holy Ghost alone, that we are enabled to perform those good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them ? Do we acknowledge these things with sincerity, and dwell upon them with holy joy, and cherish them with steadfastness, even as a treasure of great price or a goodly pearl, which we esteem so highly that we would “ sell all that we have to buy it ¹ ?”

¹ Matt. xiii. 46.

Let us not deceive ourselves ; let us not suffer ourselves to be deceived. For all the blessings, which Almighty God in his mercy bestows upon us, he expects and requires to be thanked. He bestows them for the promotion of his glory, and he would have us give glory to him. In the volume of his book are noted, both the mercies which we receive, and the manner in which we receive them. Let us receive all his mercies, especially let us receive his greatest, his spiritual mercies, with thankful and obedient hearts : lest, notwithstanding the promise of the forgiveness of sins, our iniquities be at last visited upon our heads ; and that be realized upon us, which was pronounced in righteous judgment upon the family of the aged Eli, “ Wherefore the Lord God of Israel saith, I said indeed that thy house and the house of thy father, should walk before me for ever : but now the Lord saith, Be it far from me : for them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed ¹. ”

We beseech thee, Almighty God, to give us that due sense of all thy mercies, that our hearts may be unfeignedly thankful, and that we may shew forth thy praise, not only with our lips,

¹ 1 Sam. ii. 30.

but in our lives ; by giving up ourselves to thy service, and by walking before thee in holiness and righteousness all our days, through Jesus Christ our Lord ; to whom with thee and the Holy Ghost be all honour and glory, world without end. Amen.

SERMON XLVII.

CONFIDENCE IN GOD RECOMMENDED FROM A CON-
VICTION OF HIS PROVIDENTIAL GOODNESS.

1 PETER v. 7.

Casting all your care upon him, for he careth for you.

SUPPOSE a traveller passing through a strange country, encumbered with difficulties, beset by dangers, and persecuted by enemies on every side; what more comfortable and encouraging intelligence could be given him than the assurance, that he had a stedfast friend in the prince of the country: who was wise to know all he wanted, powerful to supply all his wants, full of compassion and mercy so as to have promised to supply them, and faithful so as to be incapable of violating his promise? Assured of these things, might it not be expected, that the traveller should proceed courageously and cheerfully upon his journey; sometimes troubled perhaps by immediate afflictions, yet not per-

manently distressed ; perplexed by occasional difficulties, yet not in despair ; still looking up with confidence to the gracious Protector, who had bountifully undertaken to preserve him ; and still relying, notwithstanding the surrounding difficulties, that he would preserve him unto the end ?

Such is the condition of the Christian, during the course of his earthly pilgrimage. A stranger and a sojourner upon earth, he “ desires a better country, that is, an heavenly ;” and he knows that he must be engaged with numerous trials in his progress towards it. Tribulation and affliction, persecution and temptation, a sinful world from without, and his own bad passions and deceitful heart from within ; these are among the formidable obstacles, which he has to encounter ; but knowing at the same time that he has the promise of succour from an all-wise, an all-powerful, an all-gracious, and an all-faithful Being, to assist him in encountering them, he goeth on his course with joy, and placeth all his trust, and “ casteth all his care upon God,” for he knows that “ God careth for him.”

Desirable as this temper is, it is one which few Christians possess in its full perfection ; at the same time it is one, which it is the interest, no less than the duty, of all to endeavour to attain. According to the exhortation of the apostle, and

the reason which he assigns for it, such a Christian temper is founded, under Providence, upon a conviction of the most important truth, that we are objects of God's tender affection. "Casting all your care upon him," saith the apostle, recommending an habitual humility of mind, and resignation to the mighty hand of God; "for," he adds, assigning the reason for such humility, "he careth for you."

In considering this advice, I shall invert the order of the sentence; and having in the first place illustrated and confirmed the fundamental position, that "God careth for us," shall in the second press upon you the inference, that you be mindful to "cast all your care upon him."

1. And, first, do we doubt the truth of the position, that God careth for us; that we are objects of the Almighty's tender love? Why then did he create us? Why did he "cover us in our mother's womb?" Why were "all our members written in his book, and fashioned by him day by day, when as yet there was none of them?" Why did he "breathe into our nostrils the breath of life?" Why did he "make us only a little lower than the angels," and bestow upon us rational and immortal souls? Shall man, weak, depraved, and sinful man, be kind and affectionate towards his offspring; and shall not our heavenly Father, the God of all goodness, He, save

whom there is none good, shall not he have regard to the works of his creation? Let it be allowed only, that the Creator of the universe is a good and merciful Being, and natural reason must unite with the voice of revelation in exclaiming, “ The Lord is loving unto every man, and his mercy is over all his works ¹. ”

2. But it is not merely, that he has created us, and endowed us with many excellent faculties; he has moreover placed us in a world adapted to the exercise of those faculties, and abounding in objects of pleasure and delight. Into that world indeed, considered as it proceeded from the hands of the Creator, sin has introduced a melancholy change; and the natural as well as the moral condition of the universe has undergone a dreary revolution in consequence of the disobedience of our first parents. Man was “ created in the image, after the likeness of God: his understanding was more clearly enlightened, his reason more excellent, his affections pure, his heart and spirit holy, different from what they are become in his present corrupt and sinful state; for it is plainly with reference to the qualities, not of his person, but of his mind and soul, that he is said to have been made after the divine similitude. When he lost the like-

¹ Psalm cxlv. 9.

ness of God, he lost the happiness which was annexed to it. "Sin entered into the world, and death by sin." Nor was this all. Violence and disorder were thereby introduced into that universe, which God had created and pronounced to be "very good;" whilst the ground, out of which "the Lord God had caused to grow every tree that was pleasant to the sight and good for food," was cursed and made to bear "thorns and thistles," as a punishment for the disobedience of man.

Yet, notwithstanding the sorrow wherein we are doomed to eat of it all the days of our life, notwithstanding the infirmities and afflictions which are entailed upon our mortal state, can we look around us without perceiving, that a gracious God hath still left us numberless objects to solace, and to cheer us; numberless sources, not only of comfort, but of enjoyment and delight? "The heavens declare the glory," and at the same time the loving-kindness, "of God." The goodly sun, which enlightens us, and the pleasant air which we breathe, the fatness of the earth beneath, and the dew of heaven from above, are glorious evidences of the continual bounty of the Creator: and, although they have neither voice nor language, they declare to us too plainly to be unnoticed by any but him, who shutteth his ears against the voice of the

charmer, that he, who created, continually careth for us.

3. To the tender affection of God in creating and sustaining us, let us add his mercy also in preserving us amid the dangers and temptations, the temporal and spiritual disasters, to which we are exposed : from “ the terror by night,” and from “ the arrow that flieth by day ;” from “ the pestilence that walketh in darkness,” and from “ the sickness that destroyeth in the noon-day ;” when, “ though a thousand have fallen beside us, and ten thousand at our right hand, still no evil hath happened unto us, neither hath the plague come nigh our dwelling.” We have probably all of us had our share of suffering ; it is well for ourselves, and it is an effect and a proof of the wisdom and goodness of God, that we should have it. But whilst we reflect on the sufferings, which we have endured, and which we are now perhaps enduring, and whilst we acknowledge with contrite hearts that those sufferings fall greatly short of our deserts, let us at the same time call to mind the perils and evils, from which we have been rescued. Cast your eyes back upon the days that are past. Can you remember no danger, from which you have been saved ; no injury, from which you have been relieved ; no sickness, from which you have been raised ? Reflect upon your spiritual condition ; upon the

state of your soul. Is there no temptation, from which you have been delivered? is there no wicked companion, from whom you have been weaned? is there no sinful habit, no vicious custom, that you have learned to hate, renounce, and forsake? And is it not of the grace of God, that thou hast been preserved? is it not, that he hath “given his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways?” Is it not, that he loveth and “careth for thee?” I would that we might consider every instance of preservation, both temporal and spiritual, vouchsafed towards us, as an act of God’s superintending Providence, as an evidence and an exercise of his paternal love. I would that in every evil, from which we are delivered, in every temptation, from which we escape, we might read constantly repeated this comfortable lesson, that “God careth for us.”

4. Is it possible to find this truth attested to us by still more sufficient evidence? Is it possible to discover the care and fatherly affection of God manifested more unequivocally than in creating, supporting, and preserving us? It is. There is one proof surpassing these, and all others, which can be either expressed or imagined. “God careth for us;” for he *created* us: “God careth for us,” for he *sustaineth* us: “God careth for us,” for he hath *preserved* us: but especially and above all, “God careth for us,” for he hath

redeemed us. “In this was manifested the love of God towards us, because that God sent his only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him ¹.” Is it a proof of God’s love towards us, that he created us? much more is it, that “he hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for us, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time ².” Is it a proof of God’s love towards us, that he sustaineth us by temporal blessings? much more is it, that he feedeth us with spiritual food, with “the bread that cometh down from heaven ³,” by communion in the body and blood of Christ, and by the sanctification of his Holy Spirit. Is it a proof of God’s love towards us, that he preserveth us during our earthly pilgrimage? much more is it, that he promises to preserve his faithful followers in another country, that is an heavenly, from the consequences of their sins, from the wiles of their ghostly enemy, and from everlasting death. So that after all, that can be said in proof of the tender care of God towards us, this is the crown and consummation of the whole, that “Christ died for us.”

¹ 1 John iv. 9. ² 1 Pet. i. 3, 4, 5. ³ John vi. 83.

II. And now, that I may come to the second particular to be insisted on from the words of the apostle, if we be well persuaded of this truth, that "God careth for us," what stronger and securer ground can we desire, on which to establish our confidence, and to encourage us in "casting our care upon Him?" Exposed as we are to difficulties, and encompassed with distress of various kinds, (and difficulties and distress we must, every one of us, expect to meet with, as a part of the inheritance of our corrupt and sinful nature,) what more infallible resource, what more substantial succour, what more delightful consolation shall we find than in this reflection, that we are watched over by almighty and infinite love? Weak as we are ourselves, it would not be possible that we should sufficiently provide, were we never so solicitous, for our own welfare; but convinced that he, who is infinite in perfection, careth for us, we may assuredly cast all our care, all solicitude and anxiety of mind from ourselves, and repose our whole trust in him.

Let us apply the advice of the apostle in some of the most ordinary troubles of life. Poverty is a condition, which naturally begets anxiety. The poor man has, humanly speaking, much to care for. He has to labour hard for a subsistence for himself and his family; and it not rarely happens,

that all his labour is scarcely sufficient to procure one. What course then is he to pursue? The apostle's advice is well adapted to his case, and he cannot do better than to embrace it. I do not say that it is easy to be followed: to him indeed, who is of worldly habits and sentiments, nothing can be more difficult: and even to him, who is not well confirmed by the divine blessing in habits of piety and devotion, it is no light task. The admonition however is a portion of that Gospel, which is especially "preached to the poor," and by the poor therefore it may undoubtedly be practised: and the poor man, who labours diligently to practise it, will no doubt find himself recompensed for the attempt. Such an one, believing that God careth for him, will consider his poverty and the difficulties accompanying it, as instruments, by which God will work for his good. If therefore he derives few worldly enjoyments from his low condition, he will be thankful that it presents him with fewer temptations. If he reflects that little is given unto him, he will feel comfort in the consideration that God will require of him less. If he feels that he is lightly esteemed among men, he will derive consolation from calling to mind the promise which he enjoys of God's blessing. If he is exposed by the hardness of his lot to actual distress, and "has not even where to lay his head," he will

think less painfully of his affliction when he calls to mind, that he is only sharing the condition of the Saviour of mankind, who has promised “a crown of life to those that endure unto the end ¹,” and is now gone to “prepare for them a house ²” “not made with hands, eternal in the heavens ³.”

Sickness, and the other kindred afflictions, which are incident to our mortal state, and of which the rich as well as the poor partake, admit of the like remedy, at least of the like comfort and relief. Is sickness an evil? Let us allow that it is so: considered merely in a human view undoubtedly it is. But if it be considered on the other hand in a religious light, as sent by an infinitely wise and powerful and good God, who “careth for us,” the apostle’s admonition then comes home to our bosoms, and we feel the propriety, as well as the comfort, of casting our care upon him. We then see that afflictions are sent upon us, to “add strength to our faith and seriousness to our repentance ⁴ ;” to improve us in patience, to teach us to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God; to purify our hearts; to withdraw our affections from things on earth, and to set them on things above; and to make us more like the “Captain of our salva-

¹ Jam. i. 12.² John xiv. 2.³ 2 Cor. v. 1.⁴ Order for the Visitation of the Sick.

tion," who was himself "made perfect through sufferings¹."

Besides the sufferings of the body, are we assailed also by those of the mind? Are we subject, for instance, to spiritual despondence, to religious doubts and fears? Whither shall we fly but to the Physician of our souls? Where shall we seek relief but with him, who alone can give medicine to heal our mental sickness? On whom shall we cast our care, but on him, who careth for us? Did "God so love the world, that he sent his only-begotten Son into the world, that whosoever believeth in him might not perish, but have everlasting life²?" Did that only-begotten Son of the God of love utter his gracious invitation to every child of man, "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest?" And shall we not be assured that we have, all and each of us, an interest in the love of God? And shall we not be persuaded, that to all and each of us that gracious invitation, that most comfortable promise of the Saviour of the world, is addressed? And shall we not cast from us all anxious apprehensions, that we are shut out of the place of hope? And shall we not rather cherish an holy joy and peace in believing, that the King of glory hath opened

¹ Heb. ii. 10.

² John iii. 16.

to us the gates of heaven, provided we follow the steps of holiness, which he hath set before us upon earth ? One of the most dangerous temptations, by which “our adversary the devil, who walketh about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour ¹,” endeavours to work upon feeble minds and melancholy dispositions, is by deluding them into an unfounded persuasion, that they are out of the reach of God’s mercy. That mercy, the Holy Spirit, our Advocate and Comforter, informs us, is extended to all men ; and bidding us resist the devil, stedfast in the faith, and pointing our attention to the God of all grace, he exhorts us to “cast all our care upon him, for he careth for us.”

In laying before you these remarks, it is by no means my wish to encourage you in a thoughtless indifference, but to recommend you to cultivate such a composure and tranquillity of mind, and such reliance on a gracious God, as may be well expected to spring from a due sense of his mercy and loving-kindness. The Gospel of Christ directs our thoughts in an especial manner to two different objects, which are calculated respectively to create very different feelings. When, under the direction of the word of God, we look to ourselves, we see weak, corrupt, and

¹ 1 Peter v. 8.

sinful beings, beset with difficulties, and incapable of delivering themselves. Such a prospect cannot but fill us with anxiety and apprehension. But when, under the direction of the same holy word, we look to God, and behold a Being, infinite in goodness and all other perfections, and hear him promising to deliver those who trust in him, our feelings then undergo a revolution ; our apprehensions, founded on a consciousness of our own infirmity, are changed into confidence in his perfections ; our anxiety is superseded, and gives way to hope, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. It is this disposition of mind ; not a graceless indifference about our welfare, nor a restless and impatient spirit, nor a dismal and melancholy despondence ; but it is such a pious and devout disposition, as hath been now recommended, which best befits a believer in the Gospel, in the good tidings of salvation to mankind. And it is to them who cultivate such a disposition, and who exercise it in “ prayer and supplication ” to God for future assistance, and in “ thanksgiving ” for past and present blessings, to them, I say, it is expressly promised by the Spirit of truth, that “ the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep their hearts and minds through Christ Jesus ¹. ”

¹ Phil. iv. 6, 7.

We humbly beseech thee, O Father, mercifully to look upon our infirmities; and, for the glory of thy name, turn from us all those evils that we most righteously have deserved: and grant, that in all our troubles we may put our whole trust and confidence in thy mercy, and evermore serve thee in holiness and pureness of living, to thy honour and glory, through our Mediator and Advocate, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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SERMON XLVIII.

THE AID OF THE SPIRIT, THE GIFT OF GOD, AND
TO BE PROCURED BY PRAYER.

EPH. iii. 14. 16.

For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord
Jesus Christ,
That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory,
to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man.

It is the property of the holy Scriptures to open the eyes of man upon his real situation ; and to convince him of the errors, with respect to his own nature and powers, which in his unenlightened state he is found to entertain. Philosophy, that philosophy I mean, “falsely so called,” which would fain be esteemed superior to revelation, is fond of descanting upon the dignity and independence of man ; revealed religion, especially the Christian religion, presents us with a very different picture : it teaches us that our nature is essentially faulty, and that, as men, we are “ compassed with infirmity.”

Spoiled through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, we adopt the self-sufficient language of the church of the Laodiceans, and say, "I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing." Instructed in the truth after Christ, rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, we are taught to "know that we are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." We are thereby taught, that "we are not sufficient of ourselves to think" or do "any" good "thing as of ourselves;" we are perpetually reminded that "in us, that is in our flesh," in our original nature, "there dwelleth no good thing;" we are commanded indeed and encouraged to "work out our own salvation," but we are at the same time admonished to do it "with fear and trembling;" with a solemn sense of our own unworthiness, and unprofitableness; of our impotence, if left to our own exertions, and of our absolute dependence upon God.

This truth, an indispensable and fundamental truth in our holy religion, is frequently expressed, and, where it is not expressed, is uniformly implied, in all the exhortations to holiness of living, wherewith the sacred writings abound. Sometimes it is expressly affirmed, that of ourselves we can do nothing; that we need the assistance of a power superior to our own; that we have nothing

which we did not receive. Sometimes it is taken for granted, as a truth too obvious to need being continually repeated. But, at all times, whether expressed or assumed by the sacred writer, it is to be understood as an essential doctrine of Christianity, that “we have no power to do good works pleasant and acceptable to God, without the grace of God by Christ preventing us, that we may have a good will, and working with us when we have that good will¹.”

This general truth is delivered by the apostle in my text in a striking manner; in a practical, if I may so say, rather than in a doctrinal, form; by way rather of example, than of a plain and direct proposition. For, having entreated the Ephesians to overcome the weakness of their nature, and “to faint not at his tribulations for them,” he does not leave them to confide in their own unassisted exertions; but warns them in impressive language, that their natural weakness must be overcome by a power supernatural, and greater than their own. Devoutly beseeching Almighty God to vouchsafe them the help of his Holy Spirit, he both implies the necessity of that help to enable them to act agreeably with his injunction; and at the same time instructs them in the nature of the assistance which they re-

¹ Article X.

quired ; in the source from whence it was to flow ; and the means whereby it was to be procured : “For this cause,” he says, “I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man.” May it please the same Holy Spirit to direct our enquiries, while we proceed to consider the strength, which he communicates by his might to the inner man ; the exceeding goodness of the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, in vouchsafing this succour to his servants ; and the means, whereby he has appointed that such succour is to be procured.

1. And, first, as to the strength communicated to us by the Spirit, it is, like the source from whence it proceeds, of a spiritual nature. Man consists of two constituent parts, “of the reasonable soul and flesh.” His carnal part he inherits more signally from Adam. Formed out of the dust of the earth, our first progenitor was himself earthy, and the same image is borne by all of us, his descendants. In our spiritual part we were originally created after the image of God. Though polluted and debilitated by sin, that image is still, to a certain extent, propagated upon us. Offsprings of earth, we are still capable of receiving heavenly impressions. “Born in sin,” and naturally “servants to iniquity,” we

are still capable of being made "servants to righteousness unto holiness." "By nature children of wrath," we are still capable of being converted into "children of grace." By nature in bondage to Satan, we are still capable of being "admitted into the glorious liberty of the sons of God." By nature liable to death, we can nevertheless become inheritors of the kingdom of heaven and everlasting life.

But whatever improvement our spiritual part is capable of receiving, it is not capable of furnishing that improvement to itself. We must be wrought upon by supernatural power: we must be "strengthened with might by the Spirit of God in the inner man." How he works upon us we know not: we need not, we cannot know; and it were useless and rash to enquire; for the Scriptures not only do not supply a clue to guide us in the search, but close the door upon such enquiries, by authoritatively asserting the fact, and requiring us to believe it as an article of faith, established on sufficient evidence. Do we ask with Nicodemus, "How can these things be?" We have our answer in the reply of our Saviour, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, we speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen." Let it suffice us then, that the fact of the Spirit working within us is a part of that divine revelation, which Christ came to teach us: and

let us not busy ourselves with enquiries into the manner of his operations.

Further however, the Scriptures inform us, and therefore we are right in prosecuting the enquiry, that, whilst all the improvement afforded to our souls proceeds from “that one and the self-same Spirit,” yet his operations are greatly diversified ; and that, as “the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal,” so he manifests himself by “diversities of gifts” and graces, according to the wants of the individual, for whose benefit he is pleased to work.

Called by the sacred writers “the Holy Spirit” and “the Spirit of holiness,” not only as being perfectly holy in himself, which the Father and the Son are also, but as being the cause of holiness in believers ; the peculiar office of this blessed Spirit in the work of redemption is (as our Catechism expresses it) to “sanctify us, and all the elect people of God.”

To sanctify is to make holy what was before defiled. To contribute to this blessed change in us, whose nature is corrupted and defiled by sin, is in general terms the work of the Spirit ; who is also said to work upon us in a variety of specific operations.

By him we are regenerated, or born anew, at baptism, and are thereby admitted into that state,

which our Saviour pronounces necessary to salvation. "Except a man be born again of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." Through the instrumentality of water, "sanctified by God to the mystical washing away of sin," we are regenerated by the Holy Spirit at our baptism ; which is made unto us by its inward grace "a death unto sin and a new birth unto righteousness;" where we are "received for God's own children by adoption, and incorporated into his holy church;" wherein we are "made members of Christ, children of God, and inheritors of the kingdom of heaven."

As we grow up, it is by the same Holy Spirit that we are enabled to understand the will of God. He "enlightens the eyes of our understanding" with a knowledge of the truth, which he conveys to us, not by teaching us any new doctrines, different from those already revealed by him in the holy Scriptures, but by "opening our hearts to receive and understand" those which are there contained.

As the Holy Spirit thus instructs us in divine knowledge, so also he "prevents or goes before us, that we may have a good will to do good works pleasant and acceptable to God." For the corruption, introduced into our nature by the fall of Adam, has so weakened the powers of our minds, has given such force to our passions, and

such perverseness to our wills, that “we are not sufficient of ourselves to think any thing, as of ourselves, but our sufficiency is of God, who worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure.”

In the performance of our duty, the Holy Spirit is at hand to “help our infirmities :” he not only “goes before us that we may have a good will to do good works pleasant and acceptable to God,” but he also “works with us when we have that good will.” He “strengthens us with might in the inner man,” that we may resist the attacks of our spiritual enemies : he encourages us to pray for the blessing of our heavenly Father ; he teaches us what we should pray for ; and he animates us to pray as we ought.

If we fail in the performance of our duty, (and “there is no man who sinneth not,”) the Holy Spirit leadeth us to repentance and amendment of life : he “renews us in the spirit of our minds ;” he helps us to “put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness ;” he “mortifies the works of the flesh, and our earthly members ;” and he “purifies our hearts by faith.”

In the hour of affliction and distress the Holy Spirit is our comforter. Are we perplexed by temporal concerns ? he draws away our minds

from too fond an interest in the low and perishable things of this world, and directs them to high and heavenly things. Are we mourning from the remembrance of our sins, and sinking beneath the burden of them? he suggests to us the most comfortable reflection, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; that he promises rest to those who are laden with their sins, if they “come unto him;” and that the Gospel, which he preached, was the Gospel of salvation and of peace.

Such are some of the principal operations, wherein the Holy Spirit exercises his influence upon our souls; regenerating, instructing, leading, and assisting, strengthening, renewing, and comforting all those, who are willing to profit by his fellowship, and to submit to his influence: and such and so great being the blessings, thus bestowed upon us, how can we sufficiently admire the abundant goodness of the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who “grants us according to the riches of his glory to be thus strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man?”

2. For, if we consider this exceeding goodness, which is the second point proposed for our meditation, the blessing will be greatly enhanced by a reflection on the circumstances which accompany it. The gift of the Holy Spirit, and therein of all the benefits which he confers, is a free gift

of our Almighty and most merciful Father ; the motive for conferring it is his own goodness ; the price, that is paid for it, is his own Son.

First, the gift of the Holy Spirit is a free gift of God : it is “ not of debt but of grace ;” it is in no wise compulsory or obligatory upon God, but voluntary and gratuitous altogether. How can it be otherwise ? What claim can we advance upon God for the assistance of his Spirit ? we, who in the person of our aboriginal forefather, renounced our allegiance to God, and enlisted under the banner of his enemy ; and who have since made the apostasy of our forefather our own, each by his personal and actual transgressions ?

But if we have no claim upon God for the assistance of his Spirit, and that he grants it is an act of his own free grace, then, secondly, the motive for conferring it is his goodness : he grants it us “ according to the riches of his glory.” To give hereby a proof of his mercy and compassion and love towards us, and so to magnify his own glorious name, is the object which he proposes to accomplish in sending us his Holy Spirit. He cannot be moved to do it by any goodness in us ; for “ in us, that is, in our flesh,” in our natural man, “ there dwelleth no good thing” to move him.

Further, as the motive, which prevails on God

to send us his Spirit, is his own goodness, so the price, by which it has been purchased, is the blood of his own Son. With a view to this precious offering, which has been made for the procuring of our spiritual blessings, the apostle appears to describe Almighty God in the text by the appellation of "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." To him the promise of the Holy Ghost was given of the Father. By him the Comforter, the Spirit of truth, was sent unto his apostles from the Father. In his name and in his stead the Comforter came from the Father, to guide the apostles into all truth. And in consideration of the same inestimable sacrifice, the gift of the same holy Comforter is still continually vouchsafed to Christ's faithful followers. For, as the apostle argues, "he that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" And, if all other things, then certainly this, which is the best of all, the most conducive to our present welfare, and the most necessary to our future happiness.

3. The gift of the Holy Ghost then is of the free grace of our heavenly Father, granted by him in his goodness, and purchased by his Son. But free as is this gift of God, and utterly incapable as we are of meriting or purchasing it for ourselves, it remains in the third place to be

remarked, that he has appointed certain means, by which the aid of the Holy Spirit is to be procured.

All the blessings, which we receive from God, are free gifts of his mercy and loving-kindness ; but they are all dependent on the observance of certain appointed means. In the natural world, for instance, health and strength, food and raiment, are the free gifts of God ; but, if we would enjoy them, we must be temperate, diligent, and industrious ; for, according to the ordinary course of God's providence, temperance, diligence, and industry, are necessary to those who would be strong and healthy, who would have wherewithal to feed themselves, and what to clothe themselves withal. It is the same with respect to our spiritual affairs. The communion of the Holy Spirit is the free gift of God : but he has appointed means, whereby it is to be attained ; and if we reject or neglect the means, we cannot reasonably flatter ourselves that we shall arrive at the end. The appointed means, to speak generally, is prayer. For, as our Saviour demanded of the Jews, " if ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him ?" plainly intimating, not only that our heavenly Father will " give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him," but also that he

will withhold the blessing from them that ask him not.

The words of St. Paul are a practical comment upon the promise of Christ. "Your heavenly Father," saith our Saviour, "shall give the Holy Spirit to them that *ask* him." "I *bow my knees*," saith the apostle, "unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, that he would grant you according to the riches of his glory to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man." With what fervour, diligence, and constancy he prayed, we may collect from the advice, which he gives in this very Epistle to the same Ephesians, where he exhorts them to "pray always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and to watch thereunto with all perseverance:" at the same time the humility, with which he offered his supplications, is expressed by the term of "bowing the knees;" intimating no doubt that the lowliness of heart, with which he presented himself before the throne of grace, was accompanied and testified by a correspondent posture of the body.

The worship of the heart and soul is unquestionably the first and most important thing to be required in those, who offer their supplications to God: yet the worship of the body, indicative as it is of a suitable humility of soul, is not to be despised or slighted. In the estimation indeed of Almighty God it must be judged of some ac-

count; or it would hardly have been recommended to us by the precepts and example of so many of his chosen saints. When the holy Psalmist calls upon us to “sing unto the Lord, and to worship the rock of our salvation,” it is accompanied with an exhortation to “bow down, and kneel before the Lord our Maker.” When Solomon poured forth his prayers and thanksgivings unto God at the dedication of the temple, “he kneeled down upon his knees before all the congregation of Israel, and spread forth his hands towards heaven.” When Daniel retired into his chamber for the purposes of private devotion, “he kneeled upon his knees three times a-day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God.” When Ezra humbled himself for the transgressions of his people, he fell upon his knees and spread out his hands before the Lord his God.

But these were only members of the Jewish church; let us look then to the Christian. When Stephen “prayed for his murderers,” he “kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice.” When Peter was about to work a notable miracle, he “kneeled down, and prayed.” When Paul implored the blessing of the Holy Spirit upon the Ephesians, he “bowed his knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ:” when he had taken of the same Ephesians his last most affectionate farewell, he “kneeled down, and prayed with

them all :” and when he united in adoration with another assembly of Christian disciples, they “kneeled down on the shore and prayed.”

From saints on earth if we ascend to the angels in heaven, we shall behold the celestial hosts “falling down before him that sitteth on the throne, and worshipping him that liveth for ever and ever.” Nay the very Captain himself of our salvation, the Son of man himself, who hath set us the example of fulfilling all righteousness, when he was in his earthly tabernacle, “kneeled down and prayed to his Father:” nor was that a vague or an unmeaning expression, whereby a prophet foretold, and an apostle announced, the kingdom of Messiah, when, in declaring the worship that should be paid him, they especially declared, that “at the name of Jesus every knee should bow.”

Do not suppose that in thus insisting on the most proper posture of the body during prayer, I am ascribing any undue importance to a mere circumstance of outward ceremony. The *spirit* of devotion is unquestionably and incomparably of prime significance. But it is worthy of consideration, how far the spirit of devotion is likely to exist without the *form*, and whether he that is truly devout in heart does not naturally shew that he is so by his body. What was the practice of the most faithful servants of Christ, nay

of Christ himself in his state of humiliation, the instances already cited may suffice to prove. What practice our own primitive and apostolical Church recommends and directs for all her members, we cannot be ignorant of; and what importance she attaches to the practice, we may collect from the frequency with which she repeats the injunction for the people to join in her services, “all devoutly kneeling.” That there is a prevailing indisposition among our congregations to comply with these injunctions, is a fact which I fear must be universally notorious. How far it prevails among ourselves, and whether, wherever it does prevail, it be consistent with a true spirit of devotion, are questions of no trifling moment indeed, but such as every man’s conscience must be left to answer for himself: only let him call at the same time to his recollection, together with the reasonableness of the practice, the uniform example of all the most eminent servants of God; and especially let him remember what St. Paul has left upon record, that, when in the fervency of his affection to his Ephesian converts he coveted for them that best gift, the gift of the Spirit, to strengthen them with might in the inner man, for this cause he *bowed his knees* unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

May Almighty God enable and dispose us to

worship him with solemnity and reverence, in spirit and in truth ; that, so being visited by the healthful Spirit of his grace, we may participate in this inestimable benefit, for the merits and through the mediation of the same Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

SERMON XLIX.

SELF-MURDER A SIN AGAINST THE LORD.

1 SAM. ii. 25.

If one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him : but if a man sin against the Lord, who shall entreat for him ?

THE occasion of these words may perhaps not be immediately present to your minds. It may be useful therefore to observe, that they contain the arguments, by which the old and afflicted Eli endeavoured to correct the wickedness of his sons. He admonishes them by a representation both of human and of divine vengeance. He points out to them the punishment, inflicted by men upon transgressors of human laws : and he thence takes occasion to allude to that more terrible punishment, which awaits the transgressors of the laws of God.

The offence of which the sons of Eli were guilty was of a moral nature : but he insists upon it, not merely as a moral, but as a religious offence ; not merely as an offence against man, but

as an offence against God. “Eli was very old, and heard all that his sons did unto all Israel ; and how they lay with the women that assembled at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. And he said unto them, Why do ye such things ? for I hear of your evil dealings by all this people. Nay, my sons ; for it is no good report that I hear ; ye make the Lord’s people to transgress.” Immediately after this representation of their sin follows the allusion to the punishment that awaited them ; “If one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him ; but if a man sin against the Lord, who shall entreat for him ?” But neither human nor divine laws will deter from the commission of evil a man who has given the rein to his wild and licentious passions, and has become hardened in sin. So it was in the case of these miserable men : “notwithstanding the admonition of their aged parent, they hearkened not unto the voice of their father because the Lord would slay them.” Wearied by their manifold and repeated provocations, the Almighty withdrew from them his saving grace ; and, even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to their own vile affections and to a reprobate mind, until the measure of their guilt was full, and their career was at length terminated by a death violent and premature. The narrative of these events is pre-

served to us by the Spirit of truth : and the sins, the impenitency, and the fate, of the sons of Eli are recorded for our instruction ; an alarming example of the denunciation of the same Spirit, that “ they who despise the Lord, shall be lightly esteemed ;” and a tremendous warning of the melancholy punishment to be expected by those, who wilfully “ sin against the Lord.”

The opposition in the two divisions of the text leads me to remark, that the duties, which men are required to perform in society, are twofold : they owe duties to their brethren, they owe duties to God : or rather I should say, that, considered in a Christian light, every one of our social duties, as it should be performed on a religious principle, so should it be considered as of a religious character. “ Whatever we do, we should do all to the glory of God ¹.” The mind of man however is so gross, that it is necessary for the sanctions of religion to be seconded by the authority of human laws, in enforcing the observance of our social and moral duties. Not only therefore is the wrath of God denounced against the sinner for his offences, every one of which is a violation of God’s authority ; but “ if a man sin against another, the judge also judges him :” he is amenable also to that human autho-

¹ 1 Cor. x. 31.

rity, which he has despised. Still after all that can be done by man's interference ; after all the severity of punishment, which men can inflict upon the offender, to deter others from a like offence ; it is the anger of God, which is most to be avoided ; it is the punishment of God which is most to be dreaded ; it is to that anger and to that punishment, that our thoughts are especially to be directed. Comparatively trifling should be our fear of them, " which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul ¹ ;" for comparatively feeble is their vengeance, and comparatively light and transitory is the punishment, which they can inflict : but our fear of the divine wrath should, if possible, be great in proportion to the greatness of the power of Him, " who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."

Extraordinary offences against the laws of God appear to call for more than ordinary notice from God's ministers : not as affording occasion for uncharitable reflections upon the offender ; God forbid ! such reflections would imply a total ignorance of the spirit of that religion, for which we are put in trust ; but in order that, by a due exposition of the offence, the honour of God's laws may be vindicated, and a salutary caution may be administered to the souls of others. It

¹ Matt. x. 28.

were needless for me to specify the offence, which within the last week has been committed amongst us, and to which you will justly suppose that I here allude. A sense of compassion and charity to the unhappy being, who has been at once the perpetrator and the victim of that offence, and at the same time the fear of inflicting an unnecessary pang upon the heart of any surviving friend, strongly induce me to throw a veil over the particulars of his fate, and to consign his history to that oblivion, which the laws of the country pronounce upon his person. At the same time let it not be thought, that I am treading on improper ground, if, whilst I thus forbear from all unnecessary notice of the offender, I take occasion to direct your thoughts to the enormity of the offence, and warn you how little room for entreaty remains for those, who thus “ sin against the Lord.”

The crime of suicide may be considered as of a twofold nature, agreeably to what has been just observed with respect to the offences committed by men in society. It is a sin against men : it is a sin against God. In the former light, I do not propose to insist upon it at length ; yet thus much I would remark as I pass on, that the legislature of our country clearly shews the sense, which it entertains, of the heinous nature of the act, by refusing the rites of Christian burial to him who

commits it, and by ordaining that “ they shall not lament for him, saying, Ah my brother ! or Ah sister ! but that he shall be buried as an heathen man and a sinner, drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of our Jerusalem.” Wherefore is this sentence of our laws ? Not out of a spirit of foolish impotent revenge : not in order to wreak a childish vengeance upon the deceased : but for the purpose of branding the deed with the stamp of wickedness, and of warning those, who might be tempted to the like offence, that they beware how they expose their persons to the like ignominy and contempt. The sense of shame is so congenial to our nature, that an apprehension of being dishonoured, even after death, when we shall be ourselves insensible to the disgrace, is experimentally found to have no weak influence upon our conduct whilst alive. It is therefore in the spirit of a wise, and enlightened, and (let me add) a humane and compassionate policy, that our legislators have refused the ordinary funeral honours, and decreed an ignominious burial, to the suicide, who has destroyed himself in a sound mind. From a false and mistaken charity it comes to pass, that those, to whom is committed the decision of the question concerning the soundness of understanding in the deceased, often by an unfounded verdict frustrate the intention of the lawgiver. It is a

painful but a solemn duty, which on the present occasion has been performed by those, to whom that enquiry has been entrusted ; and who, *in deciding upon the fact according to the evidence*, instead of conforming to certain vague opinions of the impossibility of the self-murderer being sane, have accomplished the purpose of the law agreeably to which they have decided, and thereby contributed perhaps to the preservation of the lives, nay, of the immortal souls, of others.

I say, that, by holding up the crime of suicide to merited abhorrence, we may prevent the frequency of its recurrence, and so contribute to the preservation, not only of the lives, but of the immortal souls of others. For let it be observed again, and it is this view of the subject which I would especially press upon your attention, that suicide is an offence, a grievous and complicated offence, against Almighty God.

1. It is a sin against Almighty God ; for, in the first place, it is to make light of, to despise, and to reject a talent, which God hath given, which he commands us to employ for his glory and the good of others, and for the use of which he will unquestionably bring us to account. In this light all the gifts of God, whatever they may be, are to be considered ; and life, which is one of his most precious gifts, and necessary to the exercise of all the rest, is to be so considered

amongst the others. But this talent, and, together with this, all his other talents, the self-murderer absolutely renounces. The unprofitable servant, who hid his Lord's talent in a napkin, and buried it in the earth, and returned it without injury to his Lord, was condemned as a wicked and slothful servant, and cast into outer darkness amidst weeping and gnashing of teeth, for not improving his trust: how much more must it be feared, that that servant will excite the displeasure of his Lord, who violently spurns from him his talent, and throws it back upon its Giver, disfigured by outrage, and polluted with blood?

2. Suicide is a sin against Almighty God; for, secondly, it argues distrust of God's providence, and frequently impatience under his chastening hand. "Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God," says the apostle, and "cast all your care upon him, for he careth for you¹:" nor among all the various proofs of the truth of this position, can *he* be in want of one of the most convincing kind, who reflects upon that stupendous evidence, which God hath given of his love towards us, in sending his Son to die for our salvation. But the self-murderer refuses to place his trust in Him, who hath promised that "he will never leave nor forsake²" his faithful fol-

¹ Pet. v. 6, 7.

² Heb. xiii. 5.

lowers : and in a fit of irritation, or a season of despondency and despair, too often the lamentable consequence of his own previous wickedness, rises up against the offended justice of God, and rejects his offers of mercy.

3. Suicide is further an offence against the Almighty; for it is to rush presumptuously and uncalled into the presence of our Creator, who alone has the power to give life, and to whom alone belongs the prerogative of taking it away. The Scriptures instruct us, that we hold our lives, as a stewardship committed to us by our Creator. It is our duty therefore to be prepared calmly to surrender them, whenever he shall reclaim them at our hands, and to be ready to answer for our conduct before the judgment-seat of God. The judgment-seat of God is a term of tremendous import ! And who, that reflects on the duties enjoined upon him and on the imperfect manner in which they have been performed ; who, that reflects upon his own sinfulness and upon the justice and holiness of God, can avoid contemplating the great day of retribution with awakened feelings, and can do otherwise than shrink into himself at the prospect of appearing before his righteous Judge ? The prospect of that solemn scene, on which the welfare of our immortal souls depends through the endless ages of eternity, is accompanied with circumstances

of an awful nature, even to them who put their trust in God and his well-beloved Son. But the death of the self-murderer is accompanied, neither with the faith and awful hope of a Christian, nor with those feelings of alarm and apprehension which are natural to man. With an infatuation, unaccountable in a being endowed with reason and conscience, and sensible of fear, instead of coming boldly to the throne of grace that he may obtain mercy, he rushes presumptuously to the seat of judgment: and challenges the severity, and hastens the sentence, of God's justice, which he thus arms with manifold vengeance against himself.

4. It is moreover an aggravation of the sin of suicide, considered as an offence against Almighty God, that it is often an act of wilful and deliberate guilt. Upon this ground proceeds the sentence of the human law, in the prohibition of Christian burial, that the deceased did "wilfully and of malice afore-thought" effect his own destruction. The proof of a depraved will and fixed determination is not rare, where the deed, having been once attempted, but happily frustrated by the kind favour of Providence, has been again obstinately repeated, until it has at length terminated in irrecoverable death. Such a determination of purpose should appear to evince a heart, closed to the gracious influence of the

Holy Spirit of God, and resolved to execute its design however much at enmity with God's will. And it is this determination, this wilful and deliberate purpose, which in a signal degree enhances the criminality of the deed, and exposes the criminal to God's displeasure.

5. There is one other, and that a most important view, wherein suicide must be considered as especially offensive to Almighty God, and as especially exposing the perpetrator to danger. Praised be the infinite mercy and compassion of our heavenly Father, we believe, because the word of God assures us, that the sins of every Christian may be forgiven on his sincere and hearty repentance through faith in the blood of the Saviour : but we believe also, and our belief is established upon the same unerring word, that such repentance is generally necessary to the salvation of every believer in Christ. Far from me be the arrogance, the wickedness, and the folly of presuming to set limits to the mercy of the Lord Jehovah ! Yet thus much may safely be affirmed, that the mercy of God is no where promised to any other, than to the penitent and believing sinner : and that he, who dies in the commission of sin, much more he, who wilfully cuts himself off by an act of sin, and thereby closes the door against repentance, does by the same act (as far as human sight can penetrate)

close the door upon the divine compassion, and exclude himself from forgiveness and salvation. Christ “ever liveth to make intercession for them who come unto God by him ;” but “for him, who thus sins against the Lord, who shall entreat ?”

From these considerations upon the nature of self-murder, the sin against Almighty God must appear grievous, and the fate of the wretched being, who can be prevailed upon to perpetrate it, proportionably gloomy and forlorn. It is a remark which has been often made with respect to our own country, that we are especially prone to commit it. From the frequency and general currency of the remark, we may fear, that it is not destitute of foundation. At least our own information concerning the occurrences, which daily take place throughout the country, must be sufficient to convince us, that instances of the crime are too numerous not to be contemplated with regret and dismay; and there are probably few amongst us, whose recollection cannot supply them from their own acquaintance with some examples of those, who have perished by a violent and self-inflicted death. Under circumstances such as these, it must be the duty of us all to employ the methods, which Providence may place in our hands, for the prevention of so terrible an evil : and I have accordingly felt my-

self called upon by the event, which has lately occurred amongst us, to exhibit the offence before you in dismal indeed, but, I believe, in its true colours.

From the various instances of suicide, which we hear of and see around us, it should appear, that the temptations to commit it must be strong. What those temptations specifically are, I forbear upon the present occasion to enquire. Generally perhaps they may be said to consist in impatience or despondency of spirit, and in a distrust of Almighty God. If such be the case, and I am strongly disposed to think that the various instances of suicide may be referred to these general heads for their cause, the considerations, which have now been passing before us, at the same time that they impress our minds with a due sense of the enormity of the offence, may serve to furnish us under Providence with the means of resisting temptation to commit it. These considerations will have inculcated upon us the duty of esteeming our lives as talents entrusted to us by God, which we are to improve as long as it shall please him to continue them in our possession, and of which we shall be called to give a solemn account. They will have reminded us, that it is our duty to place our whole trust in God ; and, even when smarting under the rod of his justice, never to lose sight of his

mercy. They will have suggested to us, that it is our duty calmly and patiently to await the hour of death under a serious sense of our responsibility at the day of judgment. And to submit our wills to the will of our heavenly Father, as revealed in his holy word ; and especially they will have warned us of the extreme peril of our souls, if we appear at the judgment-seat of God under the burden of unrepented sin. Such reflections as these are best qualified under the good blessing of “ the Father of mercies and God of all comfort,” to fill us with that faith and patience, that repentance and holiness, that hope and joy and peace in believing, which distinguish a truly Christian spirit : and they are consequently best qualified to correct that impatience of temper, that despondency of soul, and that distrust of God and of his goodness, which are unworthy of a follower of the meek and lowly Jesus ; of a disciple of that religion, which is emphatically styled the Gospel of salvation and of peace.

S E R M O N L.

A SENSE OF RELIGION THE PROPER FOUNDATION OF SOCIAL UNION.

1 COR. X. 31.

Whether ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.

HAVING been commissioned to address you upon the present recurrence of your annual solemnity, I have deliberated a long time with myself upon the most proper subject of such an address. Not that I have been at a loss for materials on the occasion ; for this could hardly be the case with one who considered, that he was about to preach to a body of men, united under the endearing denomination of a Friendly Society, and for the laudable and benevolent purpose of providing for the relief of the sick and the lame. Either the name by which you are described, or the purpose for which you are associated, would supply an ample fund of observation for a Christian minister to address to a Christian society.

Instead however of taking up the subject in a general view, and enlarging upon the loveliness, the excellence, and the properties of Christian benevolence, in the spirit of which I trust that you are associated, I propose to confine my remarks to a particular view of your own society : and in doing this, I shall be less employed in preaching to you, than in making you preach to yourselves.

My meaning in what I have now said, and at the same time the object of my discourse, will be better understood by my remarking, that, having undertaken to address you on the present occasion, I procured a copy of the rules and orders to be observed in your society : on the perusal of which I perceived so many regulations calculated to preserve the well-being of any society, and especially of any society established for such purposes as you profess, that I thought I could not discharge the office I had taken upon me, with more satisfaction to my own conscience, or with more probability of promoting the purposes of your association, than by bringing to your recollection those resolutions of a religious and moral nature, which occur in the rules of your society, and enforcing them upon your minds with that additional solemnity, which it is probable they will acquire by being made the topics of a serious address to you from this place.

That your sentiments will agree with mine on these topics I may confidently persuade myself: for I shall not only have the sanction of our common religion in general, but also the warrant of your own judgments; for you have, (I apprehend,) by becoming members of your society, engaged yourselves, each and severally to observe, keep, and maintain all the particulars, which I shall have to lay before you.

In the text the holy apostle lays down a very comprehensive maxim, which may be very properly considered, independently of its context, as supplying one of the most valuable precepts for the regulation of human life. “Whether ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.” Look to our blessed Saviour’s commandments, and you will perceive him calling upon us all to conduct ourselves in such manner and with such views, as may contribute to the glory of our Father which is in heaven. Look to his life, which was recorded for our example, and you will see him, upon all occasions, desirous of glorifying his Father’s name. The apostle copies the model of the master, and at the same time that he gives the precept as a general rule of life, applies it to the most minute and ordinary particulars. He exhorts us not to make religion merely a business of times and seasons, of forms and solemnities, but to mingle

it and identify it, as it were, with the business and occupations of life. He bids us cultivate the religious principle, as the leading motive of all our actions, not of those only, which are more out of the common way, and which have a certain comparative importance, but of those also, which are of daily and trivial occurrence. He warns us to remember at all times and at all places, whose we are and whom we serve : to beware, that we never give the enemy occasion for blaspheming that holy name by which we are called ; but “ whether we eat, or drink, or whatsoever we do, to do all to the glory of God.”

Why have I selected this passage of the apostle for the text of the present discourse ? It might be sufficient if I were to say, that I selected it, because it lays down that principle, which alone gives to our conduct through the merits of Christ any value in God’s sight, and makes us acceptable to him. But I have a more particular reason, and one more peculiarly connected with the object of this meeting. In the very head and front of your resolutions stands the pious declaration, **IN THE NAME OF GOD BE OUR BEGINNING.** When you framed and assented to that declaration, it was surely for the purpose of expressing your confidence in that Being, from whom cometh every good and perfect gift : of calling upon him for the support of your establishment, and of re-

ferring to him all the glory of its success. Thus taking for your foundation the principle of action laid down by the apostle, you have guided me on this occasion in my selection of a text : and you will of course approve of my trying by this principle the rules that are to pass under our review.

Upon this principle proceeds in the first place your leading resolution, to “ establish a society to enter into the laudable undertaking of uniting in the bond of friendship and brotherly love, for the purpose of alleviating those calamities, which it shall please God to afflict you with, and to join in a strict determination to maintain peace and brotherly affection for the good of society.”

Taking this principle with you, and considering Almighty God as the Author, undoubtedly for wise and wholesome purposes, of all the calamities, with which we are afflicted, you have here the strongest motive for bearing with fortitude and pious resignation the infirmities, with which it may please him to afflict you. Perhaps they are sent to try your faith ; perhaps to exercise your patience ; perhaps to purify your hearts by suffering ; perhaps they are sent as punishments, as chastenings from the Lord, that ye may not be condemned with the world. But whatever be the purpose for which they are sent, if you are persuaded that they are instruments in the hand of a holy, a just, a good, and an all-

powerful Being, you will submit to them with resignation, convinced that they may be converted by piety on your part into means of improvement to yourselves, and of glory to your heavenly Father.

Carrying with you the same principle of acting with a sense of your duty to God, you will have the strongest motive for conducting yourselves in a Christian manner in your intercourse with society. Looking upon yourselves as the sons and servants of God, endowed with talents, which are entrusted to your care by him for the promotion of his glory, and accountable to him for the due employment of those talents, you will be desirous of acting so that his name may be glorified among men. And knowing at the same time from the word of truth, that the glory of God in the highest is especially promoted by the maintenance of peace on earth and of goodwill among men, you will be desirous of doing good to your brethren, and contributing to the continuance of brotherly love among your neighbours, who are, as well as you, sons and servants of God, from a sense of duty to your common Father. This is the professed purpose of your associating, namely, “to alleviate the calamities, which it may please God to afflict you with, and to maintain peace and brotherly affection for the good of society.” Such a purpose cannot be

otherwise than commendable : but that which gives to such a purpose its greatest value, its strongest security, and its most complete efficacy, is the principle upon which it is founded. In order to make benevolence a Christian virtue, it should be founded upon Christian principles. The love of man should flow from the love of God. We should, as far as we are able, do good unto all men ; but the motive on which we do it, should be a desire of promoting God's honour. " Whatsoever we do, we should do all to the glory of God."

Having thus remarked generally upon the principle of action recommended by the apostle which, I have before said, you appear to recognise in your fundamental wish, In the name of God be our beginning, I proceed to notice some of the specific rules, adopted for the regulation of your society.

It is both in a prudential and in a moral view a praiseworthy resolution which I find in your 4th Article, that " no person shall be admitted a member of your society, without a due certificate that he is a person of credit and reputation, of a sober, friendly, and peaceable disposition." Such a precaution appears absolutely necessary to the respectability and internal comfort of your body, which must depend upon the particular dispositions and characters of the

several individuals that compose it. The apostle's remark is obvious upon this point. "Whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it." So that, if a society be composed of individuals, who are of a bad or a questionable reputation, the reputation of the society, in the eyes of well-judging persons, will be of little worth: if it be composed of such as are froward or quarrelsome, its internal composure and happiness will be destroyed. You have taken the first necessary step in order to prevent so discreditable and so vexatious a condition, by preventing improper persons from being admitted among you. It is hardly requisite to be remarked, yet on account of the practical value of the observation, I am unwilling to proceed without remarking, that every member, having been thus admitted among you upon the strength of his previous good character, ought in that consideration to feel an additional motive for the preservation of his character, and to consider himself no longer worthy of being associated with men of credit and reputation, than while he can keep his own credit and reputation unimpaired.

For the same purpose, for which you endeavour to preclude the admission of improper members, you appear to have framed other reso-

lutions to control or exclude those, who may be guilty of unbecoming conduct after their admission. The mention of a few of these may serve to bring more pointedly to your recollection the duties, which you owe, not only as members of a Christian community in general, but also as members of this society in particular, the credit of which is involved in a material degree in your individual characters.

It would be discreditable and injurious to your society, that its members should be persons of vicious lives and manners, especially that they should be addicted to such vices as are productive of subsequent disease. It is therefore provided in your 8th Article that those who are so afflicted shall not be esteemed fit objects of relief; and under certain circumstances shall be immediately excluded from your society.

It would be discreditable to your society, which from its appellation ought to consist of men of friendly dispositions, if its members were quarrelsome and contentious. You have therefore wisely provided in your 32d Article, to exclude from the benefit of your contributions any one who may have been injured in a quarrel, unless it shall be satisfactorily proved upon sufficient evidence that he was not the aggressor.

It would be discreditable to your society, to hold out a reward to idleness and profligacy,

which would be the case, if you allowed your members to squander what is conferred on them for the relief of illness, in gaming or drunkenness. On which account praise is due to your 9th Article, which pronounces exclusion from the society, as the penalty for such an abuse of the purposes of its institution.

Whilst you are thus careful to prevent abuses with respect to those who derive benefit from your funds, you have been careful to prevent or correct improper behaviour at your periodical meetings by such rules and orders, as I trust are punctually, carefully, and strictly enforced. I allude to those contained in your 13th and 14th Articles, which forbid any member to be guilty of gaming, party disputes, obscene discourse, drunkenness, or profane swearing, during your hours of meeting. These offences are especially to be guarded against, by reason of their frequency in a general view ; of the encouragement which they are, some of them at least, apt to receive in a convivial meeting ; and of the danger, and the guilt, which attend them : the danger, inasmuch as they are incompatible with that peace and harmony, which should prevail in a well-ordered society ; and the guilt, inasmuch as they are at enmity with the laws of that holy Being, in whose name you have your beginning.

It is for the same reason that I refer to that

judicious and benevolent regulation in the 25th Article, which inflicts a penalty on any member, who shall be the means of hurting the good intentions of the society, by reproaching another, or telling him what money he has received during his illness or lameness. Christian charity is as tender of the feelings, as it is of the person, of another : and it is hardly, if at all, more sinful to refuse relief to the afflicted than to taunt him or reflect upon him for his afflictions.

I have selected these articles from the rules and orders of your society, and place them in a pointed manner before you, because they are of moral obligation : it is therefore my desire to recommend them to your especial attention and observance, and to recommend them in such a manner, as that you may maintain them, not merely for the sake of the penalties, which are enjoined by the rules of your association for the breach of them, but upon a higher principle, as members of a body united for the good of society in general, and having its beginning in the name of God.

Acting according to this recommendation, you will make it your serious business, each and all of you, generally to deserve the character of persons of credit and reputation, and of a sober, peaceable, and friendly disposition : more espe-

cially to refrain from vicious and licentious practices, from quarrels and fightings, from idleness and profligacy, from gaming and drunkenness, from profane swearing, obscene discourse, party disputes, and every kind of uncharitable language. In conformity to another of your articles you are here assembled in annual commemoration of your first establishment, to give the sanction of religion to your society. You act wisely, as well as piously, in making this religious solemnity a part of your engagement. Do not however let the feelings, which this solemnity is calculated to excite, vanish away when you leave the house of God. Carry them with you to the house, to which you are about to withdraw; and let them regulate your conduct in the season of festivity, and during the enjoyment of convivial mirth. Carry them thence to your own houses, and let them still cling by you in the ordinary intercourse and occupations of life. You call yourselves a Friendly Society: shew that you are really and essentially so, by cultivating harmony and brotherly love: shew that you are so upon the best principles, by shewing that you are a religious, that you are a Christian society. You may thus materially promote the good, not only of yourselves individually and of your own society in particular, but of the community at large, for

the benefit of all of which you are associated ; and you may thus promote the glory of that beneficent Being, in whose name you profess to have your beginning, and to whose glory the apostle exhorts you to do whatsoever you do.

SERMON LI.

THE COMPARISON BETWEEN MAN AND A FLOWER OF THE FIELD.

Ps. ciii. 15, 16.

As for man, his days are as grass ; as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth.

For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone ; and the place thereof shall know it no more.

THE book of nature is an ample volume, and offers to the attentive eye much and valuable instruction. It is indeed the composition of God, who has not disdained to transcribe (as it were) passages of it into the book of his holy word. Thus the sluggard is sent by him to learn wisdom of the ant, and the disobedient to learn fidelity of the ox : whilst the fowls of the air and the lilies of the field are made to read us a lecture on the folly of too much anxiety about worldly things and too little reliance on a superintending Providence. To the flowers of the field again we are indebted in the text for a very

apposite illustration of the frailty and vanity of man.

The present season is favourable for taking a particular view of this illustration. At this season, which popular and familiar language very aptly calls the dead time of the year, we cannot look round us without noticing objects, which a reflecting mind will be disposed to contemplate as emblems and figures of mortality: and such a contemplation ought to be accompanied by peculiar solemnity, when we farther reflect, to what a large portion of our mortal life we are now bidding an eternal farewell: and how much nearer we are brought in our progress towards that awful state, from which our next step will be to the judgment-seat of God.

That I may assist, with the blessing of God, in leading your thoughts into such a train, as appears to me most suitable to the present season of the year, and to the present condition of the natural world, I propose to pursue the comparison suggested by the Psalmist, between the decay of the vegetable productions of the earth, and the mortality of the life of man. May God dispose the hearts of both the hearers and the preacher to profit by the suggestion: and give us all grace “so to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom!”

1. “As for man his days are as grass, and as a

flower of the field, so he flourisheth." And indeed, in their flourishing condition, there is a natural and obvious similitude between the productions of the earth and the race of man. It is not merely the creative imagination of the poet, which discerns a lively resemblance between female elegance or youthful beauty, and the graceful form, the delightful colours, and the finely proportioned parts, of a flower ; or between the vigour of manhood, and the strength and majesty of the trees of the forest. In the language of holy writ also "the rose of Sharon" is employed as the appropriate type of female loveliness ; and "the cedar of Lebanon" as an emblem of manly strength. "As the lily among the thorns," says Solomon, "so is my love among the daughters : As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons¹."

2. But, secondly, if they are alike "lovely and pleasant in their lives," they are equally exposed to a rapid decay. "As a flower of the field, so man flourisheth ; for the wind passeth over it, and it is gone." The period of existence indeed, allotted to flowers and plants and all the various productions of the vegetable world, is almost infinitely varied, but in all it is only of short

¹ S. of Sol. ii. 2, 3.

continuance ; and the season of beauty and perfection is in all quickly succeeded by the season of alteration and of decay. Of the numerous tribes of flowers, many, which unfold with the morning, are scarcely more durable than the morning dew : many, to which a longer continuance is assigned by nature, and which would bloom for several hours, if suffered to remain uninjured on their stalks, are prematurely cropped by the hand of man ; or withered by the parching violence of the sun, or of the air ; or broken by the weight of the shower : whilst those again, which resist or escape from such injuries as these, and survive all external accidents, naturally shrink before the touch of autumn, and shrivel, and fade away. The grass in the fields falls before the scythe of the mower, and that “on the housetop withereth afore it be plucked up.” The leaves of the trees yield, and are torn off by the violence of autumnal gales, or fall without resistance before the ungenial cold of winter. Thus by various means and after various spaces of existence, an early period is affixed to the beauty of the vegetable creation : the earth was lately arrayed in a style of magnificence, surpassing that of “Solomon in all his glory :” a few weeks only are elapsed, and the eye searches in vain for a single ornament out of those countless multitudes, which clothed the

meadow with beauty and the forest with grandeur : “ the wind has passed over them, and they are gone.”

And what emblem can be better adapted to represent the frailty of human life ? Whether our lot be cast in infancy or childhood, in youth, or manhood, or old age ; whether we be cut off by the hand of violence, or distemper, or sink before the slow and gradual approaches of natural decay ; whether we “ wither while our leaves are yet in the spring,” or our time of life be suffered to “ fall into the sear and yellow leaf ;” it cannot be a very distant period ere we shall be removed to the valley of the shadow of death ; ere “ the wind will have passed over us, and we shall be gone.” “ Fearfully and wonderfully as we are made,” a trifling force is often sufficient to take us away in the midst of our days : but even if they be extended to the longest age, which mortality is heir to, how minute is the space which they occupy ! how soon is it cut off, and we are gone ! Threescore and ten years seem of long continuance in prospect ; but they wear a very different appearance to him, who looks back on them after they have been once traversed. Let the oldest amongst you reflect on events and transactions, in which he was engaged in the earlier stages of his pilgrimage ; they will probably seem to have occurred but as yesterday : the

intervening space will look like a span ; and the events, which gave importance and interest to it as it passed, will now be as a dream and a shadow. It was towards the close of a life, bountifully extended by Providence much beyond the limits assigned to the ordinary existence of man, that the patriarch Jacob replied to the enquiry of Pharaoh in that solemn and affecting declaration, "The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years : few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers, in the days of their pilgrimage¹."

3. A third particular to be noticed is, that, when the flower is withered and gone, "the place thereof shall know it no more : " which I would consider, first, as an appropriate and forcible mode of expressing the total change, which is wrought by decay in the nature and appearance of the substance. If it were possible to conceive a person at the same time capable of observation, and ignorant of the change which uniformly takes place in the productions of vegetable nature ; what would be his astonishment at learning, that the dark brown leaf of the beech-tree, and the shrivelled, sallow, unsightly petal of the rose, were the same substances, which he

¹ Gen. xlvii. 9.

had lately admired for the symmetry of their forms, the smoothness of their surfaces, the delicacy of their texture, and the brightness and glossiness of their hues, while fresh upon their parent tree ! Where in fact shall we perceive a more perfect contrast than that, which is generally presented by the same vegetable substance in its state of health and of decay ? Where, unless it be in the animal frame, whilst it is the subject of the same stupendous revolution ? The eye, sparkling with feeling or intelligence ; the lip, wreathed with smiles, or attuned to harmony ; the cheek, tinged with the glow of health, or lighted up with modesty or indignation ; how are they to be traced in the fixed and ghastly gaze, and in the pallid, sunk, and distorted features of him, who has just past the threshold of mortality ! How are the elasticity of the muscles, the flexibility and firmness of the joints, and the solidity, strength, and activity of the limbs, succeeded by universal and more than infantine debility ! How does the blood, which beat at the heart, circulated through every vein, and diffused life, nourishment, and vigour over the system, now freeze and stagnate in its current, until it be converted into a loathsome mass of putridity and corruption ! But to insist more fully on this enumeration of particulars were unnecessary. The contrast between the ani-

mated frame actuated by a living soul, and the livid, dull, and ponderous corse, is too obvious, not to strike the most careless observer ; and too awful, not to affect the most unfeeling.

There is another point of resemblance suggested by that expression of the text last noticed, where it is said, that when the flower is gone, "the place thereof shall know it no more." The flower, which had charmed the eye with its loveliness, and the scent by its fragrance ; the leaf, which had contributed, not only to adorn its native tree, but to afford a delightful and valuable refuge to those, who sought shelter under its shadow ; have lost in their withered condition the qualities, by which they were recommended. They are no longer cherished, as ministering to the pleasure or to the service of man : they are cast out and trodden under foot : and if they retain any portion of their value, it is only by being mingled with the earth, from which they derived their being and support. The tree, which was clothed with thick foliage, the stem, which was decorated with the brilliant blossom, are now entirely deprived of their late appendages. "The places thereof know them no more." Need I say more to lead you to remark the resemblance? Need I add, that no longer capable of delighting those, who have been charmed by his beauty, or of affording protection to those, who have found

refuge under his shadow, man, having flourished like a flower or a leaf, is like them also brought into the dust of death ; that “ he goeth down to the grave and cometh up no more ; that he returneth no more to his house, neither doth his place know him.”

4. We have thus traced the resemblance between man and a flower, from their state of beauty and perfection, through their decay and alteration, until we see them removed from the face of the earth, when they both return to the dust from which they were taken, and together see corruption. Thus far the resemblance is visible to the natural eye : and no divine revelation is wanted to unfold it to the reflecting mind. But here it ceases to be an object of sight ; and the mere moralist can trace it no farther. “ Alas ! ” exclaimed a heathen poet of antiquity, “ when the plants and flowers of the garden have perished, they revive again, and bloom the succeeding year. But we, mighty, wise, and powerful men, when once we die, remain insensible in the hollow tomb, and sleep a long and endless sleep, a sleep from which we never shall be awakened.”

But that farther resemblance, which the unassisted heathen was incapable of discovering by the force of reason, is revealed to man for his comfort by the sure word of God. Thus enlightened from above, the eye of faith continues to trace the

comparison, when it fades from the natural eye. Having compared man to a flower in his flourishing and in his decay, the Psalmist appears to intimate, that this is not the whole of the similitude when he continues to remark, "But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him." What is thus intimated under the old revelation of God's will, is plainly expressed under the new: or, if the words of the Psalmist will not bear the construction, by which I would explain them, the comparison is unequivocally carried on by St. Paul, who argues, that in the same manner as the vegetable seed is quickened after it has died, "so also is the resurrection of the dead." Here indeed the comparison, which the heathen moralist describes in favour of the vegetable, is really in favour of the human plant. The flower sheds its seed, and revives again, "after its kind," the same weak and perishable substance. In this respect *different* is the resurrection of the dead. "It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: it is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: it is sown a natural body," after the likeness of the earthy body of Adam; "it is raised a spiritual body, fashioned like unto Christ's glorious body, wherewith he sitteth at the right hand of God."

The foregoing comparison gives birth to reflections, which should incline us to look with humility and distrust on the frail decorations, with which mortality is invested, and to prepare ourselves for that awful change, to which we are hourly drawing more near.

For, in the first place, what in their most flourishing state are the fairest embellishments of the human body? What is the bloom of beauty in the very spring and vigour of youth, “when the evil days are as yet come not, nor the years drawn nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them? or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern¹?” What indeed is it but a quality, of which the flower of the field is a partaker in as large a degree, as the goodliest son of Adam, or the fairest daughter of Eve? a quality, which, whilst it adorns, is of no profit to its possessor: which affords a momentary gratification to the eye of the beholder, but fails of impressing his understanding or his heart.

But however valuable the endowments of bodily excellence may be of themselves, and some of them are of unquestionable value, how greatly is that value diminished, and with what humility

¹ Eccles. xii. 6.

should they be regarded by their possessors, when they are considered with respect to their tendency towards decay, and their consequent exposure to corruption? What prudent person will rely upon a possession, which not only flourisheth, but fadeth also like a flower; which, it is probable, will witness only a few revolutions of the sun, and which certainly cannot be visited by many: and which, when the night of death cometh, will be consigned to the earth, and become as though it had never been? Of the most lovely and the most robust among the children of men, there is none but may take up the solemn and affecting declaration of Job, "If I wait, the grave is mine house, I shall make my bed in the darkness." And then, where will be all the fancied value of our strength and our beauty, when the hour shall come, that we may "say unto corruption, Thou art my father; and to the worm, Thou art my mother and my sister?"

Still with whatever indifference we should regard our bodily endowments, on account of their transitory and perishable nature, and considered in the light of mere worldly possessions, they acquire a permanent and an important value in the estimation of the Christian, who reflects, that his frail body, which is now heir to corruption, will be raised in incorruption, and that the application of his present talents will determine his

future lot, either to happiness and glory, or to misery and disgrace. "When the dust shall return to the earth as it was, then also the spirit shall return unto God who gave it." The stewardship, which we have received from his hands, must then be surrendered and accounted for; and everlasting shame or everlasting glory will be our portion, according as our talents have been neglected or improved. Amongst these talents the faculties of our bodies occupy no contemptible post. Strength and health may be profitably employed in the exercise of honest industry and of active beneficence: and beauty, the most worthless of human endowments, and, generally speaking, rather a snare than a blessing, may, by being worn with humility, be made the occasion of a Christian virtue, and thus qualify its possessor for the enjoyment of those heavenly mansions, which the blood of Christ hath purchased for the people of God.

The obvious conclusion from the whole is the advice of the apostle, that "we use this world as not abusing it, since the fashion of this world passeth away¹;" or, what is implied by the Psalmist in the passage before us, that, as the days of man are transitory, whilst the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon

¹ 1 Cor. vii. 31.

them that fear him, we should improve our season of grace, and strive with the divine blessing to be numbered amongst those, “who keep his covenant and remember his commandments to do them.” All flesh indeed is grass, and the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field: the grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the fruits of a Christian life are like the word of God, which standeth fast for ever.

THE END.

